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THE North American Review

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Joseph W. Meeker:

THE COMEDY OF SURVIVAL

". . . The environmental crisis raises the possibility that the world itself and all its creatures are in jeopardy because we have thought too highly of ourselves."

(See page 11)

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A Future U.S.-China Agenda / Mailer's "Maidstone"

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The North American Review

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This magazine's first coverage of China dates back to the 1820s, and it was a special disappointment for us not to have accompanied Mr. Nixon on his February journey. (The White House sent its regrets that the NAR, as an "academic journal," could not be represented among members of the press.) Nothing daunted, David Crownfield has put together on the following pages a broad agenda to be dealt with during some future Presidential visit to China.

Joseph W. Meeker, whose sensible argument that adaptive man is a more desirable creature than idealistic man begins on page 11, is a Visiting Lecturer in Environmental Studies at the Santa Cruz campus of the University of California. He holds a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to "explore relationships between the humanities and the biological sciences" and has recently been working with Konrad Lorenz. "The Comedy of Survival" is the title chapter from a book which ought to have very little trouble attracting a publisher; we hope to offer more of Mr. Meeker's work in the near future.

The Stephen Dobyns who reviews poets Strand and Finkel in this issue is the Stephen Dobyns whose own book of poems, *Concurring Beasts* (Atheneum), received this year's Lamont award.

One non-literary note:

The American Broadcasting Company has admitted the serious possibility that *The Dick Cavett Show* may be dropped from its program schedule early this fall; as you might imagine, the cancellation would be attributed to ratings less impressive than those of Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* (on NBC) or the late movies on CBS. We think the loss of the Cavett program would be a serious one; if our readers agree, we suggest they express themselves to Mr. Martin Starger, Vice-President for Television Programming, c/o The American Broadcasting Company, 1330 Avenue of the Americas, New York 10019.

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David Crownfield

The Real U.S.-China Agenda: A Speculation

Since *The North American Review* was unable to accompany the President to China, we had to watch and read about the trip from Iowa. At this distance, it was China itself that dominated the view; the private talks were, and would have been, inaccessible. We learned of the million people sweeping snow in Peking. We heard of the clean, relatively crime-free condition of China's big cities. We saw women and men equally involved not only in industry but in government. The gross exploitations and drastic poverty of pre-revolution China seemed to be gone, replaced by a sober, coöperative, self-respecting engagement with the needs of that vast population.

Watching all this in a mood of "might-have-been," I reflected on the fact that the Chinese seem to manage a number of problems more effectively than we can. At the same time, they seem to have some difficulties we have resolved. There are also unsolved problems common to both countries. What, I speculated, would have happened if the U.S.-China agenda had been about these things? What if both sides had ignored the chance for political charades for the home folks, abandoned the insistence on rival ideological creeds, and got down to negotiating about the real human needs of our peoples? What would such an agenda look like, and what could the two countries contribute to it?

Without being a China scholar, I can only work with impressions, guesses, and wishes. Since they may express the wishes also of other Americans, I have decided to go ahead and spin them out. Maybe someday such an agenda, updated and refined, will actually be discussed in Peking and Washington. And maybe *The North American Review* will be there.

1. Common Problems of the Two Countries.

The United States has severe problems which China seems to be avoiding in the matter of urbanization. For one thing, the system of local government in large American cities is in terrible trouble. Our city-dwellers feel alienated and resentful toward city government; they have little sense that they can influence its decisions or that they are the ones for whose benefit it acts. How is urban government organized in China? Have they found a better balance than we have between "centralist" and "community-control" elements? How do they get such wide involvement and cooperation? What special problems has China encountered which they could help us avoid? "Negotiation" of these issues would be a process of question and answer, of thesis and counter-thesis, seeking the best reconciliation of the successful and the possible.

Our urban problems involve much more than the political structure of urban government. The balance of localism and centralism in education; transportation and traffic; public utilities; social services (including the problem of meeting people's needs without making them dependent) – all are unsolved problems for us, on which we could benefit from their experience. We need to know the economic basis on which they finance urban government, and how they relate industrial, residential, and marketing areas. Above all, we have lost our way with regard to the problems of law,

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order, crime prevention, justice, penology. If it is true, as it looks from here, that Shanghai has moved from having been a more crime-, vice-, and poverty-ridden city than New York twenty-five years ago to being a clean, safe, and healthy place, we badly need to find out how it was done, and how much of it can be adapted to our situation.

The cities are a major aspect, but not the only one, in the whole family of ecological and population issues. Here we are in some respects ahead and in some respects behind. As these are finally global issues, our survival may depend on how successfully China deals with them, as well as on improving our own strategies. Because of its large population and its history of poverty, China is putting heavy emphasis on increasing productivity, just when we are discovering the dangers of our own huge capacity. Can American and other Western analyses of the limits of economic growth help China to plan a healthier, more controlled growth, so that she can meet her needs at less global cost than our own?

China is a crucial area for world population control. We must ensure that the Chinese have a sufficient grasp of its urgency as a world problem. We can offer them medical and technological assistance. And we can raise a number of questions: What are their methods of nurturing cultural acceptance of population control? Can we learn from those methods? Can we help with food technology? Can we contribute useful experience on aspects of soil conservation and on the virtues and limits of various fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and hybrid seed? What role can our excess capacity for food production play, in the long run, in relation to China's need to stabilize the relation of population, food, and resources?

In addition to soil, we need to compare what we have learned and what we need to learn about other resources. What are the differences in the pattern of energy needs, and use of energy sources? How fast does Chinese economic growth deplete world supplies of non-cyclical natural resources? The two countries must begin devising coöperative strategies to maximize benefits and minimize destructive long-term consequences. The same problems and possibilities occur, too, with respect to waste. We waste immensely more. Chinese patterns of use, and their whole way of offering opportunities for personal satisfaction which do not rely essentially on consumerism as their base, might teach us a lot. On waste technology, and on analysis of the consequences of various alternatives, we may be ahead and able to help them.

If the two countries are really to talk non-ideologically about common problems, there is a great deal to discuss, pragmatically, about patterns of government, and about various types of tension between democratic, populist aspects and centralized authority. Both countries have grappled with the problems of bureaucracy and entrenchment of authorities. In both countries there has been a phase of youthful revolt against the establishments (ours opposed and theirs encouraged by central authority), both finally restrained by coercive force.

What can we tell each other from these experiences? What are the values and the limits of controlling bureaucracy from below? To what extent, and by what means, is it controllable from above? How are populism and local control to be harmonized with the importance of technology and know-how? As instruments of renewal of government, what are the relative merits and demerits of Mao's "continuing revolution" and our periodic elections?

Two more-specific problems of government stand out: The role of the army, and the organization of industry. The army plays an important, but very different, role in the two societies. How does the "people's army" concept work? Does it depend on the Chinese revolutionary experience? How does the government control the army in the two societies? What are the uses of the army, and the limits of its use? In the government of industry, what is the extent of worker control in China? How is it organized? How well does it work, in human and also in economic terms? How adaptable would it be to our very different context?

Behind all these questions about democracy and centralism lies a family of general, partly philosophical, problems touching the collective and the individual. The Western emphasis on individual fulfillment is checked by the hope that Adam Smith's "invisible hand", partly aided by government, will look out for the collective well-being. The social benefits of this individualism are so far perhaps not as great as the theory promises. China's emphasis is on the collective good, expecting the individual to find fulfillment in coöperation, brotherhood, and the knowledge that he is needed and respected for his contribution. We suspect such a system tends to crush the maverick individual and thus destroy creative, spontaneous, and innovative perspectives. We fear that such a collectivism requires people to anesthetize personal desire and choice, and we believe that is too high a

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cost. Are we right? What in fact does happen? How do people feel? We both need to look beyond our present systems toward a future that would improve, for both peoples, the balance of individual and collective good.

Careful study, rather than emotive rhetoric, should be given to the resources, benefits, and limits of coercion, indoctrination, and voluntary coöperation as means of advancing the collective good. How is it possible to maximize individual liberty without undermining collective needs? What are the actual benefits and limits of competition, both among individuals and among economic organizations, as a strategy for economic development?

Even more philosophically, the United States and China ought to be engaged in a serious discussion about the issues raised in Mill's *On Liberty*. Unlike earlier philosophers who held that individual liberty is a natural right, Mill argued that it is socially useful. The argument applies most crucially in the area of free speech. Mill maintained that in no case is a society better served by suppressing dissent than by protecting it. If this is true, China could benefit from greater openness to dissent; if it is not, we ought to learn and carefully specify the appropriate limits, which may not be at all where censors tend to put them. (Remember, I am not appealing to the American Creed of individual liberty, but to Mill's thesis that liberty is of social benefit). We would, of course, need to reëxamine in turn the merits of the Marxist claim that "free speech" in a capitalist society is an illusion. If that is true, or partially true, we had better know it.

In the field of social psychology and motivation, too, there are interesting and important issues for discussion. The interrelation between tradition and newness is different in the two societies, and complex in both. The effectiveness and the disadvantages of coöperation and competition as strategies for motivation merit psychological as well as economic study. A good deal of criticism of the work ethic has developed in the West, not simply on the parochial grounds that our abundance makes it irrelevant, but also on the ground that it is inherently repressive of personal expression and fulfillment, and generates excessively negativistic and hostile attitudes as side-effects. Most centrally, the argument is that the work ethic requires excessive sexual repression, and the resultant frustration expresses itself in ways destructive of the well-being of society. China seems to be building heavily on the work ethic, sexual puritanism, and suppression of present, individual gratification in general. Are these risks real? Can they be mitigated? Can China's great needs be met in ways that impose less pressure on the individual?

These are not like the ordinary items on an agenda of heads of government. But these, after all, are the basic issues government is about. Ultimately, the only differences between China and the United States are differences of history, of present needs, and of strategies for meeting those needs. If the first two are already-given realities, and mutually accepted, what else is there to discuss, really, but the third?

2. International Issues

This agenda should not include an item on Vietnam. At the level of negotiation we are discussing —disregarding ideological creeds and exploring the common interest of the two peoples—there need be no difference between the United States and China. Both want United States military forces out of Indo-China. Both want an end to the war, and to the rule of force; both want self-determination for the Indo-Chinese peoples. If there could be a non-ideological examination of what constitutes coercion and what constitutes self-determination for those peoples, that could be an agenda for discussion, though more appropriately with Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians than simply with the Chinese.

A major agenda item, superficially resembling an issue actually involved in the President's trip, would concern relations between China and the Soviet Union. Unlike the official Washington position in favor of dividing the two nations, however, the agenda I have in mind would be premised on the recognition that a Sino-Soviet

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conflict poses a serious threat to world peace, and that, therefore, the interest of all three peoples lies on the side of reconciling, rather than dividing, those governments. Another assumption would need to be that American-Soviet tension also constitutes a threat to peace and to the welfare of our peoples, and is thus of proper concern to the Chinese.

The primary thrust, then, of negotiations between the United States and China in this area would be to seek lessening of tensions. Each would function as a mediator in the problems between the other two. Bilateral conversations would serve chiefly as a prelude to a tripartite discussion whose priority objectives would be arms reduction and the establishment of guarantees, by all three governments, that future local conflicts in any part of the world will not be escalated by any of the major powers.

China has already been heard in the United Nations on another major international issue: the control of the seas. The immediate focus of discussion is the problem of territorial waters—how far offshore does territorial authority extend? The United States has argued for a three- or twelve-mile limit; China supports some smaller nations which claim territorial rights for 200 miles offshore. Neither position serves basic human welfare, and the discussion must be shifted to new ground. Basic world problems of marine food supply and depletion of marine life, the threat of offshore oil exploitation to marine ecology, and the pollution of the seas through waste disposal, all center on just these immediate offshore areas. All jeopardize the global matrix of all life and the source of much of our atmospheric oxygen, and therefore can absolutely not be left to national control.

The subject of negotiation should be, not the offshore extent of territorial jurisdiction, but the development of effective international limits to that jurisdiction. Rather than competition between national fishing industries, the focus must be on maintenance of the marine populations through balanced and limited harvesting. Rather than national proximity, human need for food must control the distribution of the harvest. We must limit national sovereignty not only at an offshore point, but, with respect to waste disposal, all the way inland to the river heads, so that no nationalism can permit anyone to use the oceans as a dump or cesspool to the destruction of their vitality. The exploitation of marine and submarine natural resources must be directed to world needs as well as restrained by the need to preserve the oceans themselves. Discussion must also include such other marine issues as safety standards for marine transportation (including reduction of the risk of oil spills) and some attempt to reduce the freedom of nations to use the seas to pose immediate military and even nuclear threats to the security of others. In all these, negotiation must center on identification of problems and on devising effective international controls that will serve the paramount survival interest of us all.

The United States and China both have an interest in the future of developing peoples, and a number of items require discussion. Both have a concern for the completion of the decolonization of peoples in Africa and elsewhere; we could well negotiate about its pace and methods. We could consider economic imperialism and its consequences, and appropriate means for helping rising peoples to disengage from economic domination and exploitation. Both population increase and economic growth in these countries, especially when considered together, pose a major risk to long-term human survival. What can the big powers do to help these peoples meet their needs, chiefly with their own resources, with minimum damage to the conditions necessary for world survival? Politically, too, how can these peoples develop authentic self-determination without the divisive and globally destructive institutions of nationalism? A non-antagonistic policy discussion between the United States and China would need to move in these directions, rather than play competitive chess games with world survival.

In considering the seas and the rising peoples, questions about world resources have necessarily arisen; they must be made a major independent item for negotiations. We need to coöperate in identifying the critical natural resources, their limits and recycling rates, and possible methods of controlling and sharing them. We need a more adequate inventory of the various forms of energy available and the problems and limits of each (resource depletion, environmental damage, production of waste—coal, hydroelectric, atomic, petroleum, gas, tidal, solar). Improved equity in the availability of energy is required by justice, by scarcity, and by the need to reduce potential grounds for international conflict.

Many key material and energy resources are not only unevenly distributed in the world but in critically short supply. We need to negotiate an adequate system for rationing the consumption of these scarce and irretrievable items. We need

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standards for protecting those critical natural cycles that maintain and renovate soil, water, air, and basic forms of life; and we must establish effective means of obtaining international compliance with those standards. We need to devise an adequate accounting system for allocating the real cost of our consumption of matter and energy. And we need to establish and fund, on an international basis, agencies for research and communication concerning preservation of the ecosphere. Rather than centering on trade relations and competition or market-sharing with Japan, economic negotiations with China need to cut through to these deep issues of survival.

In a utopian agenda for American discussion of international issues with China, we could hope there would be included an item on international redistribution of income. In general, the geography of world resources and the geography of world need are not well correlated. And national and international economic and military systems function on a world scale to assure that the rich get richer and the poor, poorer. The United States, above all, consumes vastly more of the world's resources than our proportionate share. Not only are we immensely richly endowed in the land we took from the Indians, but our international operations serve to give us a large share of the benefits of the natural resources of the rest of the world—in some areas, more of the local resources than are available to the local population. In terms of world need, and also as important among the factors breeding potential war, this is intolerable. On this issue, the role of our government in negotiations with China or with anyone else in the world must be not to protect our national advantage but to devise ways of reallocating those resources to places of higher need, not on a marginal, "foreign-aid" basis, but as a matter of basic right, obligation, and necessity.

Clearly this is absurd, since no national government can voluntarily negotiate away half its people's wealth. But, from a world perspective, this is exactly what has to be done. Consequently, it is precisely this "national" system of organizing our common affairs that is absurd. A negotiation of the real issues confronting the United States and China would require a serious attempt to establish viable and authoritative institutions for global control of those problems critical for global survival. Whether these institutions would be an upgrading of the United Nations or a new beginning is of no substantive importance. But a world agency would have to have authoritative jurisdiction over a number of basic issues. These must include critical resources and environmental factors in human survival; the prevention of international war (and perhaps, therefore, the control of all nuclear energy); the eradication of poverty; population control; world availability of health care; the self-determination of peoples (limited only by this global survival authority, rather than by the political and economic power of other peoples); and the guaranteeing to individuals of fundamental rights and liberties.

How to constitute such an agency would be subject to intergovernmental discussion, but the agency would need to be based chiefly on peoples, not on governments. Its jurisdiction would need to be residual rather than primary on most issues, so that any government dealing with the basic problems in a way that met world standards would be free to do so in its own way. In a proper agenda, the discussion would not bother with whether these things are going to be done, but would assume that they *have* to be done, and move directly to the problems of making them work.

The different social models and theories at work in the United States and China ought to help, not hinder, this discussion. If we are negotiating without political dogma, open to learn from each other's ideas and experiences, diversity increases rather than reduces the likelihood of success. The establishment of world institutions, the definition of constituencies and modes of representation, the financing of the operation, and the design and limits of enforcement agencies would all benefit from diverse theories and attitudes once everyone involved is agreed that the job has to be done.

Both the domestic and the international agendas I have projected are unrealistic under present conditions. If, however, one adopts a pragmatic and skeptical approach to all political ideologies, and if one assumes that nationalism is a threat to world survival, these issues immediately float to the top as the ones demanding discussion. Looked at from that point of view, they are not so fantastic. Most reasonable men recognize that political sectarianism and national chauvinism have no useful place in today's world. The fact that this agenda for international negotiations, based only on assumptions shared by most reasonable and informed men, is utterly remote from the "realities" of international politics is a measure of our predicament. □

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John B. Means

Brazil: The Hemisphere's Lost Empire

On September 7th, Brazil will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of her declaration of independence from Portugal. The occasion itself is well worth comment and discussion, and takes added significance from the unique circumstances surrounding Brazil's move toward independence in 1822, for of all the nations of Latin America only Brazil preserved the institution of monarchy through most of the nineteenth century. From 1822 until 1889 the Brazilians maintained the only viable royal house this hemisphere has ever known, under the Emperors Pedro I and Pedro II.

Since late in the eighteenth century, the Brazilian intelligentsia had witnessed the growth of the democratic ideal through the French and American revolutions. Yet, despite the development of liberal socio-political concepts in all of Latin America at that time, there was virtually no anti-Portugal or pro-independence militancy in Brazil prior to the second decade of the nineteenth century. This specific aspect of Brazil's political history, in rather considerable contrast to the Spanish-American experience, stems in large measure from the transferral of the seat of the Portuguese world empire to Brazil in 1808.

During the early 1800s the overriding fact of European politics was, in a word, Napoleon. After military successes in Prussia and Austria, he commenced formulating plans for the defeat of England, and a cardinal element in his grand strategy involved the closing of Portuguese ports to English trade. England and Portugal had been firmly allied for centuries (since 1386), and Portugal was rightly known as England's "door to the continent." Consequently, in 1806, Napoleon summoned Portugal to cease all commercial intercourse with England—or risk annihilation. Prince John (the Prince Regent ruling on behalf of his mother, insane since 1799) had little choice. Though there was certain Portuguese sentiment favoring capitulation to the French demands, there was no practical defense except the royal evacuation of Lisbon under English escort. Perhaps characteristically, the final decision to sail for Brazil was not made until almost too late, and it well may have been only inclement weather and bad roads which prevented the entire Portuguese court from being captured by advancing French armies.

Prince John took literally everything that could possibly be carried in this most elaborate transmigration of imperial government the world had ever witnessed. In addition to the ministerial archives, the giant armada was laden with the Portuguese crown jewels, the royal carriages, a 60,000-volume library, the Prince's "personal" friars, magistrates and public officials (including most nobles of the realm), stable grooms, liveried servants, wardrobe mistresses, etc. In all, some fifteen thousand people embarked with the treasures and accoutrements of empire —the entire élite of Portugal. Heading the expedition, along with Prince John, were his wife, Dona Carlota, and their young son, Pedro I, destined to become the first emperor of an independent Brazil.

With the arrival of the court in Rio de Janeiro in 1808, Brazil entered a new era. The shackles of colonial status were removed, and Rio became the capital of a vast empire which stretched across four continents. Not only had an entire European court emigrated to the New World, but a city of the Americas became the seat of an empire which included not only Portugal and Brazil, but also territories in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and various Atlantic islands.

Initially, the Court was well received by the Brazilians. The Regent, though of mediocre intellect, was mild, benevolent, and readily accessible to all, but while Prince John won the admiration and loyalty of his Brazilian subjects almost at once, his wife, Dona Carlota, was generally hated. She was a clever and ambitious woman, authoritarian with a vengeance, and cruel in exacting the tribute which she felt was due her. A political power in her own right, Dona Carlota was much more of an absolutist than her more liberal husband, and she had devoted her life to conspiring against her mother-in-law, her husband, her son, and even her granddaughter (Pedro I's daughter, a future queen of Portugal). Now, however, Dona Carlota found herself residing in Brazil, which she described as a "land of Negroes and lice." She had come against her will and she was, accordingly, ill-humored. The tropical heat, the simplicity of life in Rio, and the discomforts of the city made her direct her attentions to the weakening of the court's position in Brazil—thereby encouraging a prompt return to Lisbon. In fact, as early as 1806, Prince John had discovered a plot, devised by his wife, to seize his crown by means of a palace coup. It is not surprising that Prince John and his sons lived somewhat apart from Dona Carlota, and thus he assumed sole responsibility for his sons' education.

Even by the standards of the day, Prince John was not considered well-educated; accordingly, he did not stress formal education for his sons. The eldest, Dom Pedro, seemed especially disinclined toward scholarly pursuits, but Pedro was a handsome young man, possessed of great energy and decisiveness (apparently inherited from his mother), and he had a rather un-royal ability for getting along with all types of people. He was an expert horseman,

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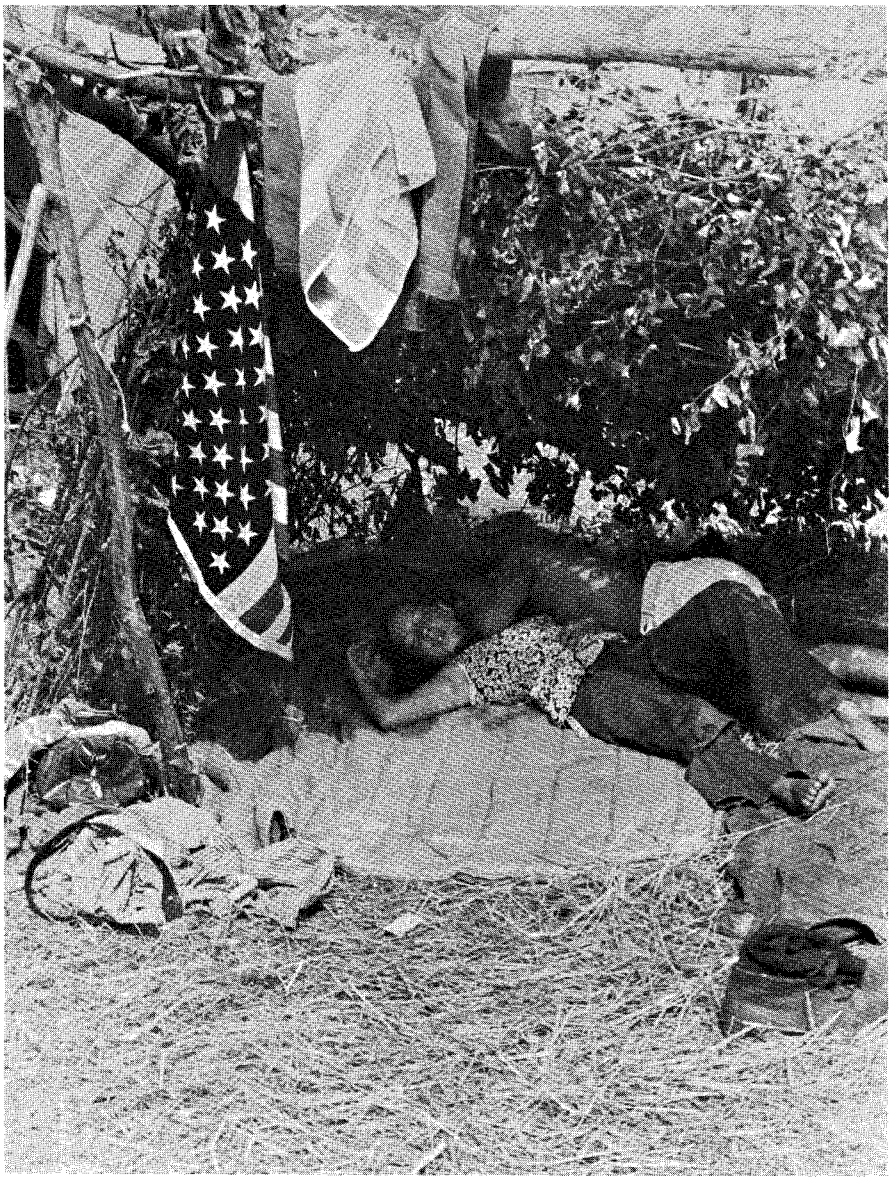
and he also exhibited various artistic talents to an unusual degree. He became especially interested in music, and he learned to play four or five instruments. Years later, intensely interested in composing instrumental and choral works (and subsequent to his rule in Brazil), Dom Pedro was to become an intimate friend of the Italian composer, Rossini, and it is said that Rossini was so impressed with one of Dom Pedro's symphonies that it was performed by the orchestra of the Théâtre Italien in 1831.

* * *

In 1816 the Portuguese Queen, Maria I, died, and Prince John became a king in his own right: John VI of the United Kingdoms of Portugal and Brazil. It was at that time that Brazil was elevated to a level of equality with Portugal—co-equal kingdoms ruled from Rio de Janeiro. In this fashion, Brazil was set substantially apart from her Spanish-American neighbors even before her independence. Brazil was, in essence, no longer a colony, and it is the only nation in the New World to have graduated from colonial status prior to the establishment of actual political independence from the mother country. (Though circumstances are dissimilar, Canada might be the sole exception.)

Although the Napoleonic threat to the Portuguese rulers was ended in 1815, and although Prince John became King John VI in 1816, the monarch nonetheless prolonged his residency in Rio de Janeiro until 1821. In that year, a revolt flared up in a large northeastern province of Brazil, sparked by French and Anglo-American republican ideals intermingled with native Brazilian loyalties. Also in 1821, a convention was convoked in Lisbon which sought to return Brazil to its former colonial status. King John VI returned to Portugal, and Dom Pedro remained in Brazil as regent. Unfortunately for the King, his departure from Brazil essentially was the culmination of the erosion of his popularity in that land. During all of John's rule in Rio, secret separatist movements—initially of little consequence—had spread throughout Brazil. During the years following Napoleon's defeat, sentiment for independence had increased notably, and the prestige of the King



was on the wane among native-born Brazilians.

Once the French armies had been driven from the homeland, King John had imported troops from Portugal in increasing numbers in order to expedite the extension of Brazil's boundaries. As is still the case, the military was costly, and the Brazilians were forced to suffer increased taxation—which they resented bitterly. On the home front, things were little better. The Portuguese felt that the King's return to Lisbon was long overdue, and that he ought to assume his "proper" throne. Even England, for reasons of her own, favored his return to Europe. Nonetheless, John had grown to love his adopted land, and he almost certainly would have remained there had not pressing political matters in Portugal forced his departure; he arrived in Lisbon accompanied by three thousand fellow Portuguese—and most of the Brazilian treasury. Young Dom Pedro was advised by his father to associate himself with any movement for independence which might materialize. In short, King John was suggesting that, if Brazil should gain independence, at least that land might still be ruled by a member of the Portuguese royal house of Braganza. The King's final words to his son are reported to have been: "Pedro, Brazil will, I fear, 'ere long separate herself from Portugal; and if so, place the crown on your own head, rather than allow it to fall into the hands of any adventurers."

Consequently, at the age of twenty-

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four, the young Portuguese prince announced his decision to remain permanently in the New World, and received wide popular support. The élite of Portugal, however, demanded his return to Lisbon, and there even was word that an expedition was being planned for the total and final subjugation of the Brazilians to the mother country. When, during travels through the hinterland, Pedro received the Portuguese ultimatum, he seized the opportunity to declare Brazil's independence; in a dramatic declaration in the province of Sao Paulo, Dom Pedro proclaimed the independent Empire of Brazil on September 7, 1822.

The Prince's birthday was October 12, and that date was chosen for his acclamation as Emperor Pedro I. Seldom had a monarch been crowned with such pomp and ceremony. An ardent admirer of Napoleon, Dom Pedro patterned his own consecration and coronation after that of the Corsican. However, the crown and scepter of the Empire did not guarantee instant recognition of Brazil's independence in the capitals of Europe. Almost a year elapsed before the final Portuguese garrisons had been removed from Brazilian territory, and over two years passed before the courts of Europe would accept the fact that Dom Pedro had sacrificed the "divine principle" of his royal Portuguese inheritance in exchange for rule at the summons of the Brazilian separatists. The United States, under President James Monroe, was the first nation to grant diplomatic recognition to Brazil. Portugal, under considerable pressure from England, acknowledged the separation in 1825—which was, to be sure, long before the newly independent Spanish-American republics received similar acceptance from Spain.

* * *

If its physical enormity and differences in language and culture were not sufficient to distinguish Brazil from her neighbors, the dynastic continuity of the Brazilian monarchy would mark the difference. Though Brazil attained independence at approximately the same time as did the various Spanish-American republics, the Portuguese royal house of Braganza occupied the thrones of both Lisbon and Rio. In all of Spanish America, no such bond survived the long and bitter wars for independence waged against Spain; the Brazilian transition was as peaceful as the Spanish-American was disruptive. While most of the emerging Spanish-American nations paid dearly for their independence with life and property, the Brazilian separation from Portugal was executed with virtually no losses of substance; social and economic structures were preserved intact. Perhaps most importantly, the passions of war—in part responsible for the Balkanization of Spanish America—never damaged the Brazilian move to independent status. To be sure, Brazil was divided (as was the United States) by sectional loyalties and provincial interests, but the ingredients for fragmentation were less in evidence. Above all, the vivid contrast between a Spanish America now splintered into eighteen sovereign republics and a Portuguese America surviving undivided is testament to the cohesive power of the Emperor.

Under two Braganza emperors (Dom Pedro I, and his son, Dom Pedro II) the Empire of Brazil survived for sixty-seven years (until 1889), and it is likely that the monarchy would have endured into the twentieth century, had the slavery issue not come to a head in 1888. Indeed, since Brazil was constituted of twenty scattered and somewhat dissimilar provinces, it is the Braganza dynasty which held the union together until a national identity emerged near the end of the nineteenth century. Had the separatist Brazilians chosen republicanism, it is probable that Brazil would have undergone splintering such as characterized Spanish America during the same period. In maintaining the aristocratic society inherited from Europe, Brazil retained social patterns common to most of the civilized world at that time. Consequently, the challenges of political independence were not overwhelming. Dom Pedro I was a unifying symbol of common loyalties inherited from Portugal, and he provided —along with his son, Pedro II—a national stability unmatched in Spanish-America. In the relatively orderly and tranquil atmosphere which characterized Brazil's decades of Empire, Brazilians took their first steps toward representative government (on the provincial level) unimpeded by the ambitious military officers and popular demagogues plaguing newly independent Spanish America. In short, Brazil enjoyed a notable degree of personal liberty and freedom of expression, despite the absence of democratic governmental structures of the Anglo-American variety; it fell victim neither to the military strongmen nor administrative chaos; its parliamentary government functioned without periodic revolutions—all under the moderating power of the Emperor. One hundred and fifty years after the coronation of Dom Pedro I, Brazil now stands as the largest, most populous, most dynamic nation in Latin America.

In Future Issues of the NAR:

More from Joseph W. Meeker on literary postures that have made it seem o.k. to waste the environment; Richard Brook (an insider) with an exploration of college and university administration, and the ironies therein; a thoughtful calculation of the rewards to be had from loving thy automobile as thyself; new fiction by Katherine Harding, Rosellen Brown, George Keithley, E. M. Broner, T. Coraghessan Boyle, Besmilr Brigham, Yvonne Postelle, Kaywynne Adams, Robert Schultheis, and others; new poems, new graphics, and all the old departments.

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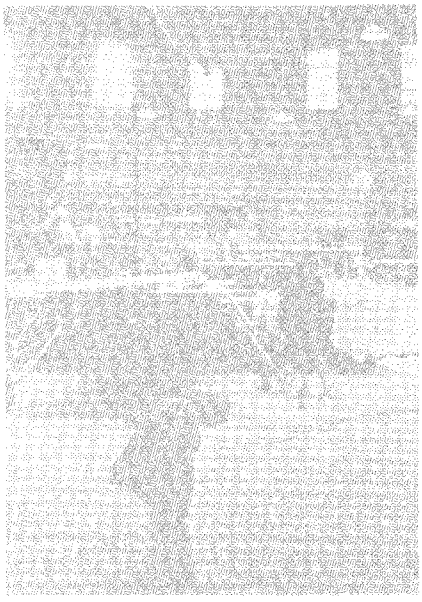

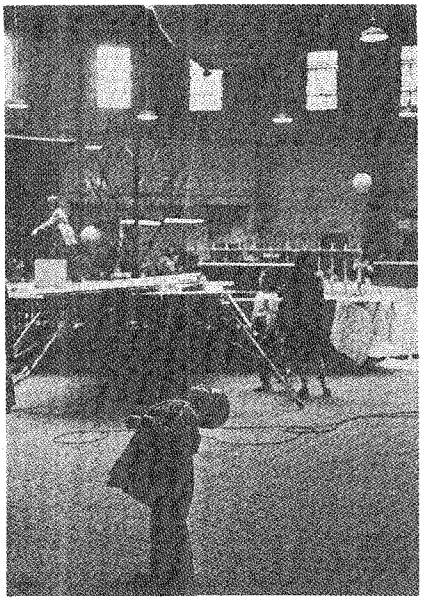

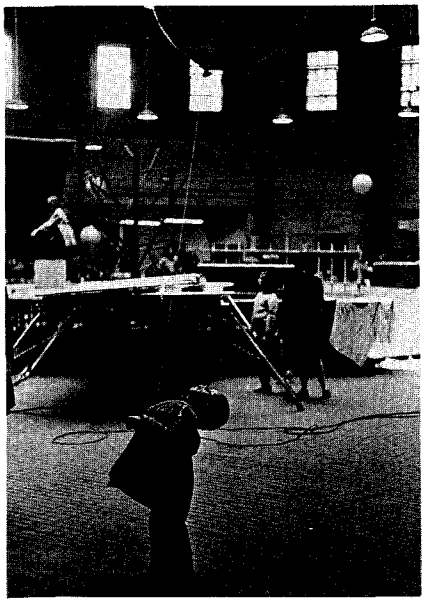

JOSEPH W. MEEKER

THE COMEDY OF SURVIVAL

Literary criticism seems determined to impress upon us the idea that literature is essentially an imitation of the actions of men. Few have disputed the doctrine of mimesis that is first spelled out in Plato's *Republic* and embellished with some modifications in Aristotle's *Poetics*, though most subsequent critics have felt obliged to argue the niceties of what mimesis really means. Avoiding the argument, let us merely assume in a simpleminded way that literature does imitate human actions, and consider two examples of such imitation. Both seek to reproduce the same fictional action, but from different historical perspectives and using different literary modes.

The first example is from Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. It is the scene early in the play where Teiresias, the blind seer, first confronts the king with the suggestion that the murderer he is seeking is perhaps Oedipus himself:

Teiresias: I say you are the murderer of the king
whose murderer you seek.

Oedipus: Not twice you shall
say calumnies like this and stay unpunished.

Teiresias: Shall I say more to tempt your anger more?

Oedipus: As much as you desire; it will be said
in vain.

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Teiresias: I say that with those you love best
you live in foulest shame unconsciously
and do not see where you are in calamity.

Oedipus: Do you imagine you can always talk
like this, and live to laugh at it hereafter?

Teiresias: Yes, if the truth has anything of strength.[1]

In John Barth's novel, *Giles Goat-Boy*, a central chapter is devoted to the translation of Oedipus' story into the idiom of comedy in a post-Freudian world. Barth's version follows Sophocles' closely, but with rather different effect. The Barth account of the meeting between Gynander (Teiresias) and Taliped Decanus (Oedipus) shows all the solemnity of a vaudeville routine:

Gynander: When this play's over you'll
regret you made that silly vow of yours.
You tragic-hero types are bloody bores.
. . . . You're
the wretch you want. You'll see, when Scene
Four's done
that you're your daughter's brother, your own
stepson
and foster-father, uncle to your cousin,
your brother-in-law's nephew, and (as if that wasn't
enough) a parricide—and a matriphile!
Bye-bye now Taliped. You call *me* vile,
but your two crimes will have us all upchucking:
father-murdering and mother—

Taliped: Ducking
out won't save you. You'll hear from me!

Gynander: You killed your daddy!
You shagged your mommy!
(he is taken away)[2]

Both scenes are recognizable imitations of the actions of men, and in this case the action being imitated is the same: the revelation of Oedipus' crimes. But the purposes, the language, the moods, and the contexts of the two passages could hardly contrast more than they do. Sophocles and John Barth are imitating different aspects of human action, and the difference between them illustrates a basic distinction between the tragic and the comic views of human behavior. Sophocles' purpose is to imitate man insofar as he is a creature of suffering and greatness; through his characters he demonstrates the enormous human capacity for creating and for enduring pain, for following a passion to its ultimate end, for employing the power of mind and spirit to rise above the contradictions of matter and circumstance even though one is destroyed by them. Sophocles imitates man's nobility. Barth imitates man's absurdity. Barth's version emphasizes the ridiculousness of Oedipus' situation and suggests that the hero is slightly dense for not avoiding or at least realizing the mess he's made of his life. Barth's image of man shows his innate stupidity and ignorance and emphasizes the triviality of human passions by reducing them to the level of street-corner disputes.

Sophocles' heroic view of man has not often been achieved. Whole cultures have lived and died without producing a tragic view of man with all that such a view entails. Tragedy, both as a literary form and as a philosophical attitude toward mankind, seems in fact to have been an invention of western culture, specifically of the Greeks. It is shared by those traditions influenced by Greek thought, though few of the cultures even in the direct line of that influence have produced a significant tragic literature rivaling that of ancient Greece. The intellectual presuppositions necessary to the creation of tragic literature have not been present in all civilizations. The tragic view assumes that man exists in a state of conflict with powers that are greater than he is. Such forces as nature, the gods, moral law, passionate love, the greatness of ideas and knowledge all seem enormously above mankind and in some way determine his welfare or his suffering. Tragic literature and philosophy, then, undertake to demonstrate that man is equal or superior to his conflict. The tragic man takes his conflict seriously, and feels compelled to affirm his mastery and his greatness in the face of his own destruction. He is a triumphant image of what man can be. Aside from the work of the Greeks and a few Elizabethans, such images have rarely appeared before us in a convincing manner.

Comedy, on the other hand, is very nearly universal. Comic literature appears wherever human culture exists, and often where it doesn't. Comedy can be universal largely because it depends less upon particular ideologies or metaphysical systems than tragedy does. Rather, comedy grows from the biological circumstances of life. It is unconcerned with cultural systems of morality. As Susanne Langer puts it,[3] comedy is truly amoral in that it has, literally, "no use" for morality—that is, moral insights play no significant role in the comic experience. Similarly, comedy avoids strong emotions. Passionate love, hate, or patriotism generally appear ridiculous in a comic context, for comedy creates a psychological mood which is incompatible with deep emotions. Great ideas and ideals fare no better at the hands of comedy, which ordinarily treats them as if they were insignificant. When noble idealism does appear in comedy, its vehicle is commonly a Tartuffe or a Malvolio whose nobility turns out to be merely a sham intended to conceal selfish or ignoble motives. The comic view of man demonstrates that men behave irrationally, committing follies which reveal their essential ignorance and ridiculousness in relation to civilized systems of ethical and social behavior. As Aristotle puts it, comedy imitates the actions of men who are subnormal or inferior to the social norm just as tragedy imitates the actions of superior men.

Many therefore argue that comedy is basically depressing and pessimistic, while tragedy is optimistic in that it shows man's potential strength and greatness. No doubt this is true, providing you believe that the metaphysical morality that encourages man to rise above his natural environment and his animal origins is humanity's best hope for

1. David Greene and Richmond Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (Chicago University Press, 1959), II, 26.

2. John Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy* (Fawcett, New York, 1967), 323.

3. Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form* (New York: Scribner's, 1953), 345.

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progress and survival. That proposition, however, is seriously in doubt in our time. We have good reasons to suspect the wisdom of our inherited traditions of metaphysical idealism. Philosophy since Nietzsche has catalogued the poverty of humanistic idealism, evolutionary biology has demonstrated the animality of mankind, contemporary psychology has shown that the mind is guided by many forces stronger than great ideas, our political philosophies fail daily to meet our simplest needs, and now the environmental crisis raises the possibility that the world itself and all its creatures are in jeopardy because we have thought too highly of ourselves. The tragic view of man, for all its flattering optimism, has led to cultural and biological disasters, and it is time we looked for alternatives which might encourage better the survival of our own and other species.

Comedy demonstrates that man is durable even though he may be weak, stupid, and undignified. As the tragic hero suffers or dies for his ideals, the comic hero survives without them. At the end of his tale he manages to marry his girl, evade his enemies, slip by the oppressive authorities, avoid drastic punishment, and to stay alive. His victories are all small, but he lives in a world where only small victories are possible. His career demonstrates that weakness is a common condition of mankind that must be lived with, not one worth dying for. Comedy is careless of morality, goodness, truth, beauty, heroism, and all such abstract values men say they live by. Its only concern is to affirm man's capacity for survival and to celebrate the continuity of life itself, despite all moralities. Comedy is a celebration, a ritual renewal of biological welfare as it persists in spite of the reasons there may be for feeling metaphysical despair.

The Greek demigod Comus, whose name we probably have to thank for the origin of the word comedy, was a god of fertility in the largest sense. His concerns included not only ordinary sexual fertility of plants, men, and animals, but also the general success of family and community life insofar as these depend upon biological processes. Comus was content to leave matters of great intellectual import to Apollo and gigantic passions to Dionysus while he busied himself with the maintenance of the commonplace conditions that are friendly to life. Maintaining equilibrium among living things, or restoring it once it has been lost, are Comus' special talents, and they are shared by the many comic heroes who follow the god's example.

Literary comedy depicts the loss of equilibrium and its recovery. Wherever the normal processes of life are obstructed unnecessarily, the comic mode seeks to return to normal. When the young men all disappear from their wives' beds in order to fight a foolish foreign war, for instance, Lysistrata makes use of her own wit and of the lecherousness of generals in order to bring the boys home again. Typical of comic action, *Lysistrata* demonstrates no discovery of a new truth and no permanent conquest over an evil force, but merely a return to a former normalcy. No enemy has been destroyed and no new conquests have been made. The victory is temporary, and it has been accomplished with the most modest of weapons: wit, luck, persuasion, and a bit of fanciful inventiveness. The

antagonists are momentarily reconciled, the killing ceases, the men make love to their wives, and the wives raise children and keep house, which is exactly what they were doing before the heroics of warfare interfered with their lives. Like most significant comedy, *Lysistrata* pretends only to show how mankind can hold its own and survive in a world where both real and artificial threats to survival abound. Comedy muddles through, but seems to care little for progress or perfection.

Those who are disposed in favor of heroism and idealistic ethics will say that comedy is trivial in its insistence that the commonplace is worth maintaining. The comic response is that man's high moral ideals and glorified heroic poses are themselves largely based upon fantasy, and are likely to lead to misery or death for those who hold them. As comedy sees it, the important thing is to live and to encourage life even though it is probably meaningless to do so. If the survival of our species is trivial, then so is comedy.

2.

If comedy is essentially biological, is it possible that biology is also comic? Probably so. Some animal ethologists argue that humor is not only a deterrent to aggression, but an essential ingredient in the formation of intraspecific bonds, and it appears to have a phylogenetic basis in many animals as well as in man.[4] Beyond this behavioral level, structures in nature seem to reveal organizational principles and processes which closely resemble the patterns found in comedy. Productive and stable ecosystems are those which minimize destructive aggression, encourage maximum diversity, and seek to establish equilibrium among their participants much as literary comedy does. Biological evolution itself shows all the flexibility of comic drama, and little of the monolithic passion peculiar to tragedy.

Ecology is to a large extent the study of plant and animal succession. Ecologists seek to understand the processes through which interactions among species over long periods

4. Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 171-173, 284-287.

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of time produce the various biological communities and environments found in the natural world. At an early stage in any given environment, pioneering or invading species dominate the scene. These are highly generalized, flexible, and adaptable creatures capable of surviving despite the inhospitable nature of their environment. Pioneers must be aggressive, competitive, and tough. On an evolutionary time scale, their careers are brief but dramatic episodes, but they make possible the more stable ecosystems which follow them. Many weeds that grow on newly cleared land following fires, volcanic eruptions, or construction projects are pioneer plants such as dandelions and crabgrass. Weekend gardeners know well their tenacity and durability. Rats, too, are pioneers capable of thriving against terrible odds by exploiting the meager resources available, as are starlings and several varieties of eels and carp. Many of the species that men find objectionable—the "weeds," "trash fish," and "nuisance" mammals and birds—are pioneering or invading species whose life styles resemble behavior that men have admired most when they have seen it in other men.

Ecological pioneering species, like human pioneers, are creatures capable of living without some of the normal needs felt by others of their kind. They are heroic individuals who make their homes where no one else wants to live, and their lives lead the way toward challenging and dangerous horizons. They risk death in order to conquer new territory, and their survival depends upon their individual qualities of strength, aggressiveness, and often their ruthlessness. Pioneer species are the loners of the natural world, the tragic heroes who sacrifice themselves in satisfaction of mysterious inner commands which they alone can hear.

Perhaps that sounds like anthropomorphism of the worst sort, but I think it is not. I am not suggesting at all that dumb plants and animals possess human qualities. Rather, the comparison suggests that much of our elaborate philosophizing over human behavior has been mere rationalization of relatively common natural patterns of behavior which are to be found in many species of plants and animals. It is part of our tragic pride that we assume remarkable behavior to be the result of a remarkable personality and an exclusively human prerogative. But Achilles does no more or less for human posterity than a fireweed growing on the slopes of a volcano does for the plants that will succeed it. The major difference, perhaps, is that the fireweed will indeed be succeeded by different kinds of plants until ultimately a complex forest emerges, while Achilles will be reincarnated by imitators from among his own species for many centuries, to the grief of many Troys and many Hectors.

The process of ecological succession begun by the pioneer species leads toward a climax ecosystem. Climax communities of plants and animals are extremely diverse and complicated groupings of living things which exist in a relatively balanced state with one another and with their nonliving environment. A climax ecosystem is a much more complicated affair than any human social organization, if only because it integrates the diverse needs and activities of a very large number of *different* species. Human social systems have only one animal to deal with, man, plus minor adjustments to keep alive the few domesticated plants and animals enslaved to man. But a natural climax accommodates not only the complete life of every species within it, but also provides for relatively harmonious relationships among all of its constituent species. In a mature ponderosa pine forest, for instance, thousands of highly specialized types of bacteria maintain stable soil chemistry as each type plays its particular role in the processes of decomposition; insects live upon plants and bacteria and are eaten by birds; small mammals breed in the complex vegetation; larger mammals eat certain specific kinds of plants or prey upon smaller animals; the many highly specialized plants, from small ferns to enormous pines, make up the setting for all other life, provide food and shelter, and in turn depend upon the environmental determinants of weather and geography. It is an unbelievably complicated community in which no individual and no species can survive well unless all other species survive, for all are ultimately dependent upon the completeness of the environment as a whole. The diversity of a climax ecosystem is one of the secrets of its durability.

Life for any individual in such a system is a dangerous affair, for there is always some other individual nearby who needs to eat him. The welfare of individuals is thoroughly subordinated to the welfare of the group. No individuals and no particular species stand out as overwhelmingly dominant, but each performs unique and specialized functions which play a part in the overall stability of the community. It is the community itself that really matters, and it is likely to be an extremely durable community so long as balance is maintained among its many elements.

Few men have ever known what it means to live in a climax ecosystem, at least not since the emergence of consciousness which has made man man. We have generally acted the role of the pioneer species, dedicating ourselves to survival through the destruction of all our competitors and to achieving effective dominance over other forms of life. Western civilization, at least, has developed as a tragedy does, through the actions of pioneering leaders who break new ground and surmount huge obstacles. Religion and philosophy have usually affirmed the pioneer's faith that only our own kind really counts, and that we have a right—perhaps even an obligation—to destroy or subjugate whatever seems to obstruct us. Some of our more benevolent societies have provided for wide diversification among men, but none has extended *e pluribus unum* to include other species.

Like comedy, climax ecology is cosmopolitan. Whatever may exist has an equal right to exist, and no individual prejudices or passions are sufficient cause to threaten the welfare of the structure as a whole. Necessity, of course, is real. All must eat and in turn be eaten, storms must come and go, and injustices must occur when so many rightful claimants contend. But that is just the point: comedy and ecology are systems designed to accommodate necessity and to encourage acceptance of it, while tragedy seeks to avoid or to transcend the necessary in order to accomplish the impossible.

We can accomplish whatever we can imagine, according to the teachings of our humanistic tradition, and many of

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our imaginings have been directed toward making ourselves more perfect. Our brain makes it possible to modify human behavior according to conceptual plans which may or may not agree with established natural processes or with man's own instinctual needs. Unlike other animals, man can select from a large number of conceptual possibilities the behavior that he prefers for mating, social organization, aggression and defense, rearing of offspring, and the maintenance of food supply. The capacity to choose one's behavior presupposes the possibility of choosing erroneously, and it may be that many of the environmental problems facing us today are the products of our own mistaken choices. But what does "mistaken" mean, and how can we possibly know the difference between ecological wisdom and ecological insanity? It is a bit depressing to realize that such questions have been asked seriously only in recent years. Generally, our behavior has been guided by presumed metaphysical principles which have neglected to recognize that man is a species of animal whose welfare depends upon successful integration with the plants, animals, and land that make up his environment.

Because they cannot choose as broadly as we, other animals have more successfully maintained the behavioral patterns which make their own survival possible while

contributing to the long-term maintenance of their environments. The recent growth of ethology, the study of animal behavior, is a sign that we are beginning to see animals as significant sources of information about living well. The ancient prejudice that animal behavior is merely a simplified form of human behavior is no longer tenable, for ethologists have consistently discovered that even the simplest of creatures follow exceedingly complicated and often highly sophisticated patterns of behavior, many of which continue to defy human understanding. The rituals of reproduction and rearing, the defense of territory, the maintenance of social systems, nest-building, migrations, systems of food-gathering are animal activities quite as intricate as our own systems for doing the same things. The simplest migratory bird has a guidance system that is more subtle and far more reliable than our most sophisticated ICBM, and any pair of whooping cranes has a courtship and sex life at least as complicated as Romeo and Juliet's. We are slowly beginning to realize that we have grossly underestimated the animals.

The truth may be that civilized human life is much simpler than most animal life. We seem to have used our enlarged brain in order to reduce the number of choices facing us, and we have sought the simple way of destroying or ignoring our competition rather than the more demanding task of accommodating ourselves to the forces that surround us. We establish artificial polarities like good and evil, truth and falsehood, pain and pleasure, and demand that a choice be made which will elevate one and destroy the other. We transform complicated environments into ecologically simple farmlands. We seek unity and fear diversity. We demand that one species, our own, achieve unchallenged dominance where hundreds of species lived in complex equilibrium before our arrival. In our present environmental dilemma, we stand like a pioneer species facing heroically the consequences of our own tragic behavior, and we have much need to learn from the more stable comic heroes of nature, the animals.

Tragedy demands that choices be made among alternatives; comedy assumes that all choice is likely to be in error and that survival depends upon finding accommodations which will permit all parties to endure. Evolution itself is a gigantic comic drama, not the bloody tragic spectacle imagined by the sentimental humanists of early Darwinism. Nature is not "red in tooth and claw" as Tennyson would have it, for evolution does not proceed through battles fought among animals to see who is fit enough to survive and who is not. Rather, the evolutionary process is one of adaptation and accommodation, with the various species exploring opportunistically their environments in search of a means to maintain their existence. Like comedy, evolution is a matter of muddling through.

Literary comedy and biological evolution share in common the view that all change is conservative.[5] Organisms and comic heroes change their structure or behavior only in order to preserve an accustomed way of life which has been threatened by changes in the environment. The fish that developed lungs when his home in the sea became untenable was not a radical revolutionary, but a public-spirited preserver of his genetic heritage. The famous peppered moth of Birmingham who changed his color from light grey to black when smoke from the industrial revolution discolored the bark on his native trees may have denied thousands of years of moth tradition, but his adaptation made it possible to preserve moth existence. If there were moral philosophers among the fishes and moths, these

5. Charles F. Hockett and Robert Ascher, "The Human Revolution," *Current Anthropology*, 5, No. 3 (1964), 140.

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innovations would very likely have been condemned as threats to the continuity of tradition, or perhaps as shameful immorality. All admiration would no doubt have been reserved for the heroic fish who would rather die than eschew gills and the moth who nobly faced his end wearing customary grey. Fossilized remains attest to the many extinct animals who insisted upon the propriety of their traditions in the face of a changing world.

To say that change is conservative may confuse anyone who thinks the term is the antonym of "liberal" and that it describes a mental attitude in favor of traditional social values and customs. The conservative principle in biology is evolutionary, signifying those variations in structure and behavior which adapt an organism more perfectly to a changing environment, thus conserving its genetic continuity despite changes in form. Whatever may threaten the continuity of life itself is expendable and subject to modification by evolution, whether it be gills or social rituals. To evolution and to comedy, nothing is sacred but life itself.

The old Italian whoremaster in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* teaches a similar lesson:

> I was a fascist when Mussolini was on top, and I am an anti-fascist now that he has been deposed. I was fanatically pro-German when the Germans were here to protect us against the Americans, and now that the Americans are here to protect us against the Germans I am fanatically pro-American.[6]

Nately, the naively idealistic American soldier to whom he is talking, sputters in dismay that he is a shameful, unscrupulous opportunist, and the old man replies only: "I am a hundred and seven years old." Young Nately, committed to the idealism of keeping the world safe for democracy, dies in combat before his twentieth birthday. The old man's morality rests upon the imperative of preserving life itself at all costs, a principle which overrides all other moral commitments.

Evolution is just such a shameful, unscrupulous, opportunistic comedy, the object of which appears to be the proliferation and preservation of as many life forms as possible without regard for anyone's moral ideas. Successful participants in it are those who remain alive when circumstances change, not those who are best able to destroy competitors and enemies. Its ground rules for participants (including man) are those which also govern literary comedy:

1. Adapt to circumstances if possible.
2. Avoid all-or-nothing choices.
3. Any alternative is preferable to death.
4. Encourage all diversity.
5. Accept the accidental limitations of birth and environment.
6. Prefer love to war; if war is inevitable, humble the enemy without destroying him.

The tragic events depicted in literature cannot occur if these principles are observed; comic action follows naturally from them.

6. Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (New York: Dell, 1961), 251-252.

3.

Oscar Wilde offered an important amendment to Aristotle when he observed that life imitates art at least as much as art imitates life. Artists and thinkers create images of what life might be like and so provide models for human behavior which men may imitate. Don Quixote was not born a knight-errant, but discovered his profession by reading tales of adventure. Like him, we can choose to some extent the roles we wish to play from among the many models preserved by our literature and cultural traditions. Generally we have preferred to imitate the tragic mode, perhaps because it satisfies our vanity and makes our actions seem important. It is gratifying to think of oneself as a hero, a great sufferer, a martyr, or an oppressed idealist. Oedipus and Hamlet might not have kept our attention all these centuries if they had not offered illustrious images showing us how to bear pain magnificently. But the tragic heroes preserved in literature are the products of metaphysical presuppositions which most of us cannot honestly share, any more than Don Quixote could live up to the requirements of medieval chivalry in Renaissance Spain. A post-Freudian world no longer sees incest as an offense against the universe as Oedipus did, nor can we share Hamlet's view that revenge will give peace to the ghost of his slain father. The philosophical props and settings for genuine tragic experience have disappeared in recent centuries. We can pretend to tragic heroism, but our pretense is painfully hollow and melodramatic without the beliefs that tragedy depends upon.

Prerequisite to tragedy is the belief that the universe cares about the lives of human beings. There must be a faith that some superior order exists, and that man will be punished if he transgresses against it. It matters little whether this principle takes the form of fate, the gods, or impersonal moral law, for all are symbols of the world's interest in human actions and evidence that the welfare of all creation somehow depends upon what humans do. Corollary to this is the assumption that man is essentially superior to animal, vegetable, and mineral nature and is destined to exercise mastery over all natural processes, including those of his own body. The most respected tragedy further assumes that some Truth exists in the universe which is more valuable than life itself. There must be abstract ideas and values which are worth dying and suffering for, or else the hero's painful quest for spiritual purity and enlightenment becomes ludicrous and absurd.

Absurd is the adjective used to describe these assumptions, in the rather technical sense in which existential philosophy uses the term. The faith upon which the tragic edifice has been built is seen in our time as a clear illustration of the contradiction between man's expectations and the world's refusal to meet them. The world has never cared about man, nature has never shown itself inferior to humanity, and truth has never been revealed in its awesome majesty except in the creations of tragic literature. Tragedy does not imitate the conditions of life, but creates conditions which men mimic in their attempts to attain the flattering illusions of dignity and honor. In an age which perceives dignity, honor, truth, law, and the gods as the

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inventions of egocentric man and not as given facts of the universe, tragedy can only parody itself.

More appropriate to our time are the relatively modest assumptions made by the comic spirit. Man is a part of nature and subject to all natural limitations and flaws. Morality is a matter of getting along with one's fellow creatures as well as possible. All beliefs are provisional, and subject to change when they fail to produce harmonious consequences. Life itself is the most important force there is: the proper study of mankind is survival. When the existence of many species, including our own, and the continuity of the biological environment are threatened as they are now, we can no longer afford the wasteful and destructive luxuries of a tragic view of life.

As patterns of behavior, both tragedy and comedy are strategies for the resolution of conflicts. From the tragic perspective, the world is a battleground where good and evil, man and nature, truth and falsehood make war, each with the goal of destroying its polar opposite. Warfare is the basic metaphor of tragedy, and its strategy is a battle plan designed to eliminate the enemy. That is why tragedy ends with a funeral or its equivalent. Comic strategy, on the other hand, sees life as a game. Its basic metaphors are sporting events and the courtship of lovers, and its conclusion is a wedding rather than a funeral. When faced with polar opposites, the problem of comedy is always how to resolve conflict without destroying the participants. Comedy is the art of accommodation and reconciliation.

Though the comic/ecological view of life may be modest and unheroic, it is anything but simple. Some superrationalists like Ayn Rand reject the current interest in ecology by arguing that a "return to nature" (*à la* Rousseau) would be a denial of the mental capacities of mankind, as well as being impossible in a world as complicated and populous as ours. Their assumption that nature is simple while civilization is complex is one of the sad legacies of romantic thought. Post-Renaissance philosophy has taught us to think of nature either as an idyl of simplicity and peace populated by noble savages (Rousseau and most romanticism) or as a bloody battlefield where only the most brutal can survive (Hobbes and nineteenth century social Darwinism). Both views drastically oversimplify the intricate processes of nature because they reflect the methods and values of a pioneer species, man, and thus overlook the complexity that is present in the more highly developed species of an ecological climax.

If a "return to nature" were to be based upon the model of a climax ecosystem, civilization would have to become far more complex than anything man has yet produced. Our values could no longer assume that man is at the center of creation, but would have to provide also for the welfare of all the plants, animals, and land of our environment. Man would have to cultivate a new and more elaborate mentality capable of understanding intricate processes without destroying them. Ecology challenges us to vigorous complexity, not passive simplicity.

If the lesson of ecology is balance and equilibrium, the lesson of comedy is humility and endurance. The comic mode of human behavior that we find in literature is the closest we have come to describing man as an adaptive animal. Comedy illustrates that survival depends upon our ability to change ourselves rather than our environment, and upon our ability to accept our limitations with laughter rather than with shame or grim resignation. It is a strategy for living which agrees well with the demands of ecological wisdom, and we can no longer afford to ignore it as a model for our behavior if we hope to keep a place for our species among the other animals who live according to the comic mode.

Dante called his poem *The Comedy*. Some theologians who mistook Dante's intention later added "divine" without the author's permission, and the mistake has led readers since to see the work as a textbook of medieval religious beliefs. But Dante's purpose was "to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity."[7] In order to accomplish this, Dante believed that he must present the world in all its complex multiplicity so that men could better understand where they were in relation to everything else, material and spiritual. Misery, according to Dante, is the result of mistaking or distorting one's vision so that only a fragment of reality can be seen, and then taking that fragment for the whole. Felicity becomes possible as the eye learns to see the millions of fragments which make up the universe interacting with one another to create a cosmos.

Dante's *Comedy* presents an ecological view of life in the largest sense of ecology. His Hell is a sink of noxious gasses, polluted water, and denuded forests. The people there have caused their own misery, for they all suffer an impairment of vision which causes them to exaggerate their selfish rights and to satisfy themselves at any cost to others or to the world around them. All seem rather heroic to us, for they live according to the principles of tragic heroes.

Purgatory is a place of learning, where men discover what else there is in the world beside themselves. As they increase in understanding and perspective, they begin to see the causes of human misery and degradation, and so gradually become free of them.

Paradise is an extremely complicated place, physically and intellectually. The inhabitants there see themselves as a part of the complex physical, spiritual, and social life of the world, and they are intensely aware of their own relationships to what they see. Paradise is where human awareness expands to comprehend the complexity of things, rather than reducing complexity to simple principles easily grasped. The focus there is on the *processes* of life, not upon goals or rewards. In his final vision in Paradise, Dante sees:

> that which is scattered in leaves through the universe, substances and accidents and their relations as it were fused together in such a way that what I tell of is a simple light. I think I saw the universal form of this complex, because in telling of it I feel my joy expand.[8]

Dante's vision is genuinely comic, thoroughly ecological, and the highest expression of both comedy and ecology. □

7. Dante, *Epistola X: Letter to Can Grande*, tr. P. Wicksteed (E. P. Dutton, New York).

8. Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 87-93, tr. Sinclair (New York, Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 483.

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Early in 1916 Evgenii Zamyatin (1884-1937) was sent to England to supervise the construction of ice-breakers for the Russian government. Shortly after his return home some eighteen months later, the "Englishman from Moscow," as the great Russian poet Alexander Blok referred to Zamyatin, published two satires on English life: "The Islanders" (1918) and "The Fisher of Men" (1921). Both works satirized the hypocrisy, smugness, and conformity of British middle-class respectability, and in many ways previewed the literary devices and principal themes of his famous utopian novel We.

A STORY BY EVGENII ZAMYATIN

THE FISHER OF MEN

Translated from the Russian by
Marvin Kantor and John Conron

The most wonderful thing in life is delirium, and the most wonderful delirium is being in love. In the morning fog (bleary as love), London raved. Milky rose, squinting, London drifted– it doesn't matter where.

Light columns of Druid temples– only yesterday factory smokestacks. Aerial cast-iron viaduct arches: bridges from mysterious island to mysterious island. Curved necks of antediluvian-huge black crane-hoists: ready to plunge in for the catch. Startled, clangorous gold letters splashed out towards the sun–"Rolls Royce Auto," and faded away. Again–in a slow bleary circle: fretwork of sunken towers, undulant web of cables, slow round-dance of drowsy turtle-houses. And as a fixed axle: the titanic stone phallus of the Trafalgar column.

At the bottom of the milky rose sea, Bailey the organist drifted along deserted morning streets: it doesn't matter where. He shuffled along the asphalt, stumbled on spindly, absurdly long legs. Blissfully he squinted; hands stuffed in his pockets, he stopped in front of showcases.

Have a look at those boots! Brown leggings; giant black rubbers; and tiny patent leather ladies' shoes. The great master-cobbler, the divine poet-cobbler. . .

Bailey the organist prayed at the cobbler's showcase:

> "I thank Thee for tiny shoes. . . And for smokestacks, and bridges, and Rolls Royce, and for the fog, and spring. And, so what if it hurts, for the pain as well. . ."

Riding the sleepy elephant–the first morning bus, Bailey the organist was sped towards Chiswick, homebound. The conductress, maternally bun-hipped (a flock of kids at home), good-naturedly kept an eye on the passenger: looks like he's had a drop or two, poor devil. Look at 'is mouth hanging open, his lip drooping.

The lips, thick and sure to be as soft as a foal's, blissfully smiled. The head, with matching, protruding, bent-edged ears, bobbed: Bailey the organist drifted.

"Hey, don't you get off here, sir?"

The organist dazedly unsquinted his eyes. What– get off already?

"Have you had a drop or two, sir?"

Foal lips open, the organist shook his head and laughed gaily:

"Have I had a drop or two? My dear lady– *better* than that!"

He descended the stairs from the top of the bus.

Below in the fog, the Kraggs's shined-for-Sunday windows squinted in embarrassment and burned like milky rose flames. The sun was rising.

The organist turned to the conductress, silently pointed to the window and just as silently– hugged her and kissed her with foal-soft lips. The conductress wiped her mouth on a sleeve, laughed, pulled the bell cord: what do you expect from somebody like that?

And the organist– dove into the narrow alley, quietly unlocked the back gate of his house, entered the yard, stopped near a coal heap and looked up over a low brick wall: at the window of his neighbors, the Kraggses. In the window–a white curtain breathed rhythmically with the wind. The neighbors were still asleep.

Hat doffed, he stood there until a light shadow flickered on the curtain. A hand flickered for an instant, turned rose in the sun–lifted the curtain-edge slightly. Bailey the organist put on his hat and entered the house.

2.

Mr. and Mrs. Kraggs were eating breakfast. Everything in the room had a metallic sheen: the fire irons, the mahogany

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chairs, the snow-white tablecloth. And possibly the tablecloth pleats could be metallically unpleated; and possibly the chairs were metallically cold to the touch: metal painted mahogany.

On the solid green rug behind Mr. Kraggs's metallic chair– four shiny indentations: this is where the chair goes after breakfast. Four shiny indentations as well behind Mrs. Kraggs's chair.

On Sundays Mr. Kraggs indulged himself with crabs for breakfast; crabs Mr. Kraggs adored. Bits of crab claws swallowing bits of words, Mr. Kraggs read the papers aloud:

"Steamer. . . mmm. . . keel up a long time. . . bottom hit from underneath. . . Yes, marvelous crab, just marvelous! Zeppelins over Kent again, six men, eleven. . . mmm. . . Eleven– eleven– yes: eleven women. . . For them a man– just like. . . like. . . Laurie, wouldn't you like a piece of crab?"

But Mrs. Laurie had already finished– and was putting away the spoons. Mrs. Laurie had a magnificent collection of tea spoons: a gift from Kraggs. Silver spoons– and each adorned with enamel and a gilt coat-of-arms from one of the cities of the United Kingdom. Each little spoon had its own special coverlet. Mrs. Laurie was slipping the spoons into their respective coverlets and smiling: on her lips– a curtain of the sheerest but nonetheless opaque rose silk. Just pull the cord– the curtain would open immediately, and you would glimpse the kind of person she is, the she behind the curtain, the real Laurie. But the cord has been lost–and the curtain sways only slightly with the wind, up and down.

The vanished Mr. Kraggs suddenly popped up from under the floor, stood before Mrs. Laurie on an invisible pedestal–a kind of dwarfish cast-iron minimonument–and held out a pasteboard box.

"My dear, that's for you."

In the pasteboard box were white and pale rose slips, something fantastically lacy, and gossamer stockings. Mr. Kraggs was chaste-minded, couldn't abide nakedness, and his fondness for lacy things was merely a natural consequence of his chaste-mindedness.

Mrs. Laurie still hadn't gotten used to this magnificence. Mrs. Laurie blushed, and the rose curtain on her lips began to flutter more rapidly:

"Ah, you were lucky again. . . on the Exchange– or. . . wherever it is you do business, you're so close-mouthed– who can tell. . ."

"Hmm. . ." Mr. Kraggs sucked his pipe, and as usual, without raising his cast-iron eyelids, smiled triumphantly on the pedestal.

Mrs. Laurie examined the pale pink, fantastically lacy and gossamer things: on one stocking she discovered a torn seam. Putting them aside, she offered her cheek to Mr. Kraggs. Kraggs extinguished his pipe with a finger, shoved it into his pocket and pressed his lips to her cheek. The jaw and lips of Mr. Kraggs jutted like a cape into the world sea: the lips were specially designed for sucking.

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Mr. Kraggs sucked. A ray of light shot a dust-stripe through the window. Everything shone metallically.

3.

Upstairs in the bedroom, Mrs. Laurie re-examined the stocking with the torn seam; stored everything in the appropriate bureau; carefully, with soap, washed her face; and took Mr. Kraggs's new trousers from the wardrobe: in them he would go to church.

There was a draft from the window. The trousers fluttered. On Mr. Kraggs, very likely, the trousers would look beautiful and would strike a harmonious note with his physique. But isolated in space– Mr. Kraggs's trousers were nightmarish.

There was a draft from the window. Fluttering, the trousers came alive: a squat, truncated, cubical creature composed only of legs, a bulging belly and other appendages. And any minute now they'll take off and go, strutting in crowds and through crowds, and swelling– and. . .

The window had to be closed: Mrs. Laurie walked up to it; poked her head out for a second; slowly, deeply blushed and angrily scowled: Again?

In the courtyard on the right, by the coal heap, stood the absurdly long and thin–a pasteboard cut-out–Bailey the organist. He held his hat in his hands, protruding ears translucent in the sun, blissfully smiled–straight into the face of the sun and Mrs. Laurie.

The upper half of the window jammed, and while Mrs. Laurie, scowling all the while, pulled impatiently at the frame– a window to her left rattled, and a shrill quavering voice began to cluck:

"Good morning, Mrs. Kraggs. No, well I'll be! No, how do you like that? No, I'll drop over now– no, I can't . . ."

Mrs. Fitzgerald's relationship to the entire world was summed up with the minus sign "No." The minus had existed ever since she was forced to sell her castle in Scotland and move to Abbot Street. The minus plunged like a spear into Bailey the organist. And how could it be otherwise, when one of Mrs. Fitzgerald's nine daughters had for a long time been having 'private lessons' in the evenings with Bailey the organist?

Mrs. Laurie descended to the dining room, marble as always, with the same immutable–sheerest of gauzy silks– curtain on her lips.

"Kraggs, Mrs. Fitzgerald is on the way over. Your trousers are hung out–upstairs. Yes, by the way: that Bailey, you know, is becoming quite impossible, forever gaping into the bedroom window."

The cast-iron minimonument on the pedestal was motionless, only under lowered eyelids– a blade of eyes.

"If he keeps on doing it, then. . . why haven't you until now . . .? Perhaps, after church today I'll have a word with him. Oh, yes."

Mrs. Laurie turned to draw the blinds:

"Yes, please do, and in no uncertain terms. . . It simply hurts your eyes to look: such a sun, isn't it?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald was already knocking at the door. Mrs. Fitzgerald was a turkey: on her craning neck,– her head

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always canted, and always– one eye cocked skyward, from which any minute a black kite could swoop down and carry off one of her nine turkey-poults.

Mrs. Fitzgerald clucked and quavered about the organist:

"No, just think: in the parish– not one beautiful young woman who wouldn't . . . who . . . No, his poor wife, she's simply an angel: she locks all the money away from him and hides the doorkey, but he manages–through the window . . . And just this minute I took a look out the window . . . no, just think!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald cocked one eye skyward, the other– at Mrs. Laurie. Mrs. Laurie walked right into the hiatus–as if through an open door: not bothering to knock.

"I just asked Kraggs to have a word with Mr. Bailey about this. It will be very amusing. Come and see the vaudeville–after church."

Mrs. Fitzgerald kept distrustfully scanning the sky for kites:

"Oh, Mrs. Laurie, you, *you*, I know, are not at all like other people. I know."

The cast-iron minimonument, eyelids unraised, motionlessly looked up at Mrs. Laurie:

"Not like other people–well, what is she like then?"

God knows: the curtain cord was lost.

4.

Here, on Abbot Street, it was still London–and yet not London. Neighbors knew neighbors intimately; and everyone, of course, knew the highly respected Mr. Kraggs. Everybody knew: on the Stock Exchange–or generally speaking somewhere–Mr. Kraggs conducted a profitable business; he had an account at the London City & Midlands Bank, a beautiful wife; he was one of the voluntary apostles of the Society for the Fight against Vice. Mr. Kraggs's stroll, in his new trousers, to the Church of St. George was indeed a triumphant procession.

Bestowing a grace on the sidewalk with each step, the flattened minimonument lifted and lowered his paws, briefly attaching himself to one pedestal, then a second, then a third: the sidewalk was an integrated series of pedestals from house to church. Without raising his eyelids, the minimonument graciously smiled; he glittered continually with sun flashing from his top hat; and strode forward, graced by the presence of Mrs. Laurie, as the bas-relief on the pedestal of Richard the Lion-Hearted modestly but harmoniously adorns the Lion Heart.

And behold, the equation of Mr. Kraggs's triumphal procession is solved at last– the church.

Narrow crevices out into the world– windows. On the mosaics of stained glass– stags, shields, skulls, dragons. The bottom halves of the mosaics were green, the top halves orange. From the green– soft, primordial moss crept along the floor. Footsteps became muffled, quieter and quieter, quiet as if in the deeps, and God knows where– the whole world, crab, cheek, torn seam in a stocking, one-eyed Mrs. Fitzgerald, tiny spoons in coverlets, thirty-two years . . .

Above, in the choir loft, Bailey the organist began playing. Gradually, insidiously, over the green moss, rose and grew an orange sun. And now turbulently upwards, directly overhead, and breathing was impossible except through the mouth, as in the tropics. Grass orgiastically interwoven, moss-shaggy trunks risen convulsively towards the sun. Black-orange branches of the bass, with delicate coarseness, innerly deeper and deeper–and there is no salvation: women opened up like shells, God was thrown into a frenzy by their prayers. And perhaps only Mrs. Laurie alone sat magnificently marble, as always.

"You didn't forget about Bailey?" whispered Mrs. Laurie to her husband as it was ending.

"I? Oh no . . ." Mr. Kraggs flashed blades from under his lowered eyelids.

One-eyed Mrs. Fitzgerald looked up worriedly at the hypothetical kite, gathered under wing her nine turkey-poults in white dresses and stood on tiptoe to keep from losing Mr. Kraggs in the crowd and missing how his encounter with Bailey would go.

Outside, next to the church door, was the grave of Haig the knight, decapitated long ago for papistry: on the stone in stone armor lay the knight without a head. And here, next to the knight who had lost his head, the ladies flocked around Bailey the organist.

"Mr. Bailey, today you played so especially well. I prayed so, prayed so, that . . ."

"Mr. Bailey, you know that you–that you . . ."

"Mr. Bailey, couldn't you–I should like only . . ."

High above the parted, expectant lips swayed the organist's head, the translucent bent-edged ears. And still higher, squinting from its very self, the sun streamed headlong–it doesn't matter where.

The organist had long, simian arms, but even so he could not embrace them all at once. The organist blissfully swayed his head:

"My dears, if I could . . ."

Bailey the organist sank into reverie about the great Isis–with a thousand outstretched arms, with a thousand blossoming nipples, with a womb (like the earth) receiving all seed . . .

"Ah, my dear Bailey!" He, of course, as usual, was surrounded . . . "May I have a word with you?"

This was Kraggs. He raised himself to the top step, adorned with the marble presence of Mrs. Laurie–and waited.

Bailey turned like a compass needle, stumbling over his feet, pulled off his hat, ran up, squeezed Mr. Kraggs's hand and beamed his eyes at him–almost audibly, "Dear, one and only Kraggs, you too–and you as well, wonderful Kraggs . . ."

The three of them stepped to the side, and only Mrs. Fitzgerald remained discreetly in the background, nodding her head approvingly at each of Kraggs's words and with one eye darting spears of minus signs into Bailey's back.

"Listen, my dear Bailey. My wife tells me that you are forever spoiling the view from her bedroom window. What have you to say about this? Eh?"

Sun wine rang in Bailey's head, the words were only faintly audible. But when the words came through, Bailey withered, his forehead wrinkled, instantly you could see:

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a mass of loose skin on his face, like a baggy suit bought ready-made.

"Mrs. Laurie? No . . . it can't be." Bailey's lips flapped in confusion. "Mrs. Laurie, you didn't tell . . . of course not, that I, of course: you didn't. Of course . . .

He himself thought it was absurd that he could believe it, even for a moment. He threw up his hands—began to smile blissfully.

Mrs. Laurie purled her brows. She lingered. Already the claws stirred on Kraggs's stomach, and joyfully, Mrs. Fitzgerald rose up on her tiptoes. But just at the very last moment, Mrs. Laurie exploded in laughter.

"Imagine, Mr. Bailey: I told. And you know very well: I was compelled to do it. Yes, you know."

Bailey began to blink. Again: the sagging ready-made suit. Suddenly, with both hands, he jammed his hat down on his head, and, omitting goodbyes, listening to Kraggs no longer, he started to run, stumbling along the sidewalk.

With Mrs. Fitzgerald's minus signs winging after him, he ran—then, for no reason at all, in mid-step, he stopped, as if nailed down. God knows what struck him and what he remembered—but he smiled broadly and blissfully, and joyfully waved his hat at the Kraggses.

Kraggs shrugged:

"Simply abnormal."

And proceeded home—from one pedestal to a second, the second to a third, along an unbroken series of pedestals.

5.

London raved under the sun. London whirled along.

A stream of top hats, of white hats with huge brims of anxious open lips, broke the dam. Elephant buses stampeded in a herd, frenzied by spring, and, bending their heads, sniffed each other like dogs. Posters cried out in raspberry, green, and orange voices: "Rolls Royce," "Waltz—The Two of Us," "Automatic Sun." And everywhere, among the flashing legs, letters and wheels, lightning-quick newsboys in white collars were hawking extra editions.

Top hats, elephant buses, Rolls Royces, automatic sun, brimmed over and, of course, might have washed away houses and statues of policemen at intersections, had it not been for the downpour into the "metropolitan" and underground roads: the 'tubes.'

Elevators gulped down one mouthful after another and descended into the hot womb; and here the raving London blood pulsed and streamed still more frantically along the hollow concrete tubes.

Raving London flowed out of town, into parks, onto grass. They rushed, drove, walked, and wheeled countless wicker prams with newly manufactured babies. Through the clearest panes of the window, Mrs. Laurie watched the countless prams moving along the pavement.

On the Kraggses' window, like an excited trill, knocked Mrs. Fitzgerald:

"Mrs. Laurie! Listen, Mrs. Laurie! Is my Annie at your place? No? Well, then, she's run off again, out of town with that . . . No, you're lucky, Mrs. Laurie: you haven't any children . . ."

On Mrs. Laurie's marble brow were two of the faintest of wrinkles, perhaps merely testifying to the genuineness of the marble. But perhaps they were the only faults in this purest of marble.

"And where is Mr. Kraggs?" Anxiously, Mrs. Fitzgerald's one eye stared up.

"Mr. Kraggs? He said he had to be off somewhere, on business for that group of his—the Fight against Vice."

"No, you're so lucky, so lucky . . ."

Mrs. Laurie paced the dining room. The legs of one of the metallic chairs stood outside their designated nests in the rug. Mrs. Laurie moved the chair. Then she went upstairs to the bedroom and raised the blinds: the window was open, the room was being aired. Though Mrs. Laurie was certain the window was open, she had for some reason to raise the blinds and look.

Mrs. Laurie sat down again in the dining room and watched the procession of countless prams. But Mr. Kraggs—the little white cross of an Apostle of the Society for the Fight against Vice on his lapel—Mr. Kraggs was somewhere, slowly being carried along the echoing tubes. His cast-iron brows lowered to a special edition: zeppelins spotted over the North Sea at three o'clock. This was really quite opportune.

"Excellent, excellent." Mr. Kraggs looked forward to success: the atmosphere was conducive. And Mr. Kraggs decided to capitalize on it—in Hempstead Park.

Hempstead Park was brimming with champagne: a light fog, gilded throughout with hot sparks. In pairs, tightly on small benches, shoulder to shoulder, closer and closer. A cumbersome dress smouldered, and solar champagne streamed from body to body. And over there a couple on the green silk of the grass, covered by a raspberry umbrella: only legs and a bit of lace in view. In the gorgeous universe under the raspberry umbrella, eyes closed, they drank the maddening champagne.

"Extra! Zeps over North Sea at three o'clock!"

But under the umbrella—in the raspberry universe—they were immortal: what did it matter if in that other, remote, universe, people were going to be killed?

And a carousel of lightning-quick urchins swept by: butt collectors; hawkers of extra editions, luck, kissing piglet toys, patented pills for men. And a chattering clown and steam puffing vendors' carts of sausages and chestnuts and a herd of top hats—in single file, like elephant buses frenzied with spring.

A whistle shrilled—unbearably—like a whiplash. And again: a whiplash. Heads emerged from under the raspberry umbrella, from under top hats, huge white hats: on a table the cast-iron minimonument; it stood there, whistling intently.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Mr. Kraggs stopped whistling. "Ladies and gentlemen, extra: zeps over the North Sea. Ladies and gentlemen, look at yourselves: are you ready to die? Death will come today. It is you who will die . . . no, no, not your neighbor but *you*, beautiful lady under the raspberry umbrella. You're smiling, your teeth are sparkling, but do you know how a skull smiles? Stop—just a moment—and look at yourselves: have you done everything necessary to be ready for death? You, under the raspberry umbrella?"

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"Not yet, they haven't done everything . . ." piped the thin voice of the clown, who had paused in his chattering.

They laughed. The beautiful lady laughed and covered herself with the raspberry umbrella-sky and, in front of everybody, pressed her knees against her Adam: they were alone in the raspberry universe, and they were immortal, and the park was brimming with hot sparks.

Mr. Kraggs whirled around the raspberry universe: from under the umbrella, black ladies' shoes and brown men's shoes. The brown men's shoes—and the silk, blue and brown polka-dotted socks—were obviously of the best and most expensive kind. This deserved attention.

Mr. Kraggs strolled, carrying his huge crab claws before him on his stomach, his eyelids lowered. Having lowered his cast-iron eyelids, Mr. Kraggs dined; at the next table dined the beautiful lady of the raspberry umbrella. She was brimfull of the sweet amber juice of the sun: it was agony not to be able to take a sip. Apples on a calm, sultry evening—already ripe, full of sap, glowing, gasping: ah! if only they quickly break off the branch—and fall to the earth.

She rose, Lady Apple of the raspberry umbrella, and her Adam also rose—it doesn't matter who he is: he's simply the earth. In slow motion, heavy laden, they climbed a hill that was turning violet in the dusk, drifted across the brow and sank into the earth on the other side. Heads—then just the raspberry umbrella— and then gone.

Mr. Kraggs waited a moment. Still hiding something under his lowered cast-iron eyelids, he climbed the hill, looked around and with (for a minimonument) unexpected rat-like nimbleness scampered down.

There below, everything was quickly getting fuzzy, all overgrown with nocturnal violet wool—trees, people. Under the stifling fur coats of bushes, tender, fuzzy beasts were breathing hard and whispering. Shaggy, silent Mr. Kraggs nosed about the park like a giant nightmarish rat; blades glittered—blades of eyes on a woolen snout opened to the night; Mr. Kraggs wheezed. The raspberry umbrella was nowhere to be found.

"Boat . . ." Mr. Kraggs's claws clenched and snatched at the last thing: once or twice he had made a find in a boat.

A dark, peaceful pond. A couple of swans in the middle, piercingly white in their nakedness. And in the distance, under a cozy overhanging willow— a boat.

Mr. Kraggs quickly paddled along the grass on his paws. The swans got closer and closer, whiter and whiter. On tiptoes, cautiously, he leaned over the trunk of the willow.

The boat was below. Completely darkened, shielding their faces, the shaggy umbrella, until moments ago still raspberry, was in one end of the boat; in the other end—legs, swan-white in the darkness.

Mr. Kraggs wiped his face with a handkerchief, unclenched his claws. Gleefully drawing a breath, he lay still for a moment and then, silent and shaggy, he crawled on his belly down along the slippery clay.

"Good evening, brethren." Next to the boat stood the minimonument. Eyelids modestly lowered. Jutting nose, lower jaw and lips smiled.

The swanlike whiteness flashed and disappeared. A shriek. The umbrella leaped into the water and floated off. A shaggy beast leaped out of the boat at Kraggs:

"What the Devil! Where do you get off . . . I'll just—I'll . . ."

Mr. Kraggs smiled, his eyelids lowered. His terrible crab claws unclenched, snagged the arms of the beautiful Lady Apple's Adam—and Adam, panting, was caught in the trap. Mr. Kraggs smiled.

"You—will come—with me—to the nearest—police station. You and your lady,—I'm terribly sorry. You will declare your names there, yours and your lady's. And then we shall meet in court: it pains me to speak of this. Oh, you tell the lady to stop crying: for a breach of morals in a public place—the punishment is not really so harsh."

"Listen . . . you devil! Will you let go of my arms? I'm warning you . . ."

But Mr. Kraggs held on tightly. Lady Apple knelt in the sand now, covered her face with her palms and, sobbing, pleaded incoherently. Mr. Kraggs smiled.

"I'm truly sorry for you, my dear lady. You are still so young—and to be brought to trial . . ."

"Oh, anything you wish—only not that. Really, anything—anything you wish." The lady's swanlike arms showed white in the darkness.

"Very well: for your sake alone, charming lady. Promise that you will *ne-ver* again . . ."

"Oh, you're so . . . merciful . . . like the Lord. I promise you—oh, I promise!"

One claw still held the crushed deflated Adam; with the other claw, Kraggs pulled out the whistle and stuck it in his mouth.

"Now, don't you see: one step—and I'll blow . . ." and he released the prisoner. He looked the man over from silk socks to head, sized him up and tersely shot out:

"Fifty guineas."

"Fifty . . . guineas?" The man took a step towards Kraggs.

Kragg's whistle began to chirp—barely audible now, but in a second . . . The prisoner stopped.

"Well? Do you have a check book with you? I'll hold a light for you," Mr. Kraggs offered amiably. He pulled out a pocket flashlight.

The prisoner, grinding his teeth, wrote a check on the London City & Midlands Bank. The lady, eyes glazed, drifted after her umbrella. The umbrella was disappearing slowly and irretrievably into the shaggy darkness. Mr. Kraggs, clenching the whistle between his teeth, smiled: two months provided for. Fifty guineas! Mr. Kraggs was not often so lucky.

6.

Dark. The door to the next room is slightly ajar. Through the gap in the doorway— across the ceiling, shines a beam of light: someone carrying a light, something has happened. The beam of light moves faster and faster, and dark walls—further and further, into infinity, and this room— London, and thousands of doors, lights toss about, beams across the ceiling toss about. And perhaps— it's all delirium . . .

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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Something has happened. The black sky over London—split apart into little pieces: white triangles, squares, lines—a silent geometrical delirium of searchlights. Blinded elephant buses (their lights out) stampeded headlong by, going somewhere. Footsteps of belated couples came along the pavement—distinctly, a feverish pulse—died out. Doors slammed, lights went out. And now, swept by a sudden plague, the deserted, hollow, geometric city: silent domes, pyramids, globes, arches, towers, battlements.

For an instant the silence swelled, stretched, like a soap bubble, and— burst. From a distance, cast-iron footsteps started droning and stamping like bombs. Higher and higher—sky-high—a raving truncated creature—legs and a belly—blindly, stupidly trampled as with bombs the cubic anthills and ants below. Zeppelins . . .

The elevators had no time to swallow: ants poured down the emergency staircases. They hung to the steps, streamed with a roar into the tubes—it doesn't matter where; they scrambled out—it doesn't matter where. And they thronged in this delirious underground world with its overhanging concrete sky, its labyrinthine caves, stairways, suns, kiosks, dispensers.

"Zeppelins over London! Extra extra special edition!" Mechanical wind-up urchins scurried about.

Mr. Kraggs was sped along in the subway car, stood clinging to the strap, not raising his eyes from the special edition. More and more hats and top hats got aboard, pushed him from his pedestal— forward—up against a pair of knees— the knees shook. Mr. Kraggs looked up: Lady Apple.

"Oh, what's this! You here too? How nice, how very nice . . . I beg your pardon: it's so crowded . . ." Mr. Kraggs took off his top hat with a smile.

Lady Apple was alone. Lady Apple responded to Mr. Kraggs with a dumbly submissive smile.

In Mr. Kraggs's left inner pocket lay the check for fifty guineas, and it warmed Mr. Kraggs's heart. Mr. Kraggs—joked amiably:

"Like the early Christians, we are forced to escape into the catacombs. Isn't that really, Miss, quite comic?"

The Miss felt that she should laugh—but the laugh wouldn't come. With all her might, she tried— and, finally, did laugh—a peculiar, ridiculous, indecently-loud sound, heard through the whole car. From all sides people turned around to look. Mr. Kraggs tipped his top hat and hastily pushed his way forward . . .

"Hammersmith! The train goes no further!" The conductor rattled the door; they poured from the car.

From overhead, through elevator shafts and stairwells, boomed a resounding cast-iron rumble. Top hats and enormous canted hats— stayed on the platform, merged into the blinding white walls and blended with the raspberry and green posters, the motionlessly speeding faces in a "Rolls Royce Auto," with an "Automatic Sun." In the white-tiled catacombs a crush of strange poster-Christians found refuge.

Perplexed, Lady Apple looked about, fixed her eyes on the only familiar figure—folded claws on his stomach, padded paws—and mechanically, like a sleepwalker, stepped into the elevator with Kraggs. The elevator whisked them up, to the street.

In the black sky white lines and triangles flashed; hollow turtle-houses and trees streamed along, stamping, rumbling. Lady Apple caught up with Kraggs.

"Listen . . . Excuse me . . . Couldn't you, for God's sake . . . take me somewhere . . . I was supposed to get off at Leicester Square, I don't understand a thing . . ."

The cast-iron minimonument stopped short for a moment, for eons. Under his lowered eyelids, in the darkness—blades of eyes.

"Really, I'm very sorry. But I'm in a hurry to get home. And besides . . ." Mr. Kraggs laughed silently; it was simply ludicrous just to think: he— and . . . and . . . some . . .

Directly overhead—in waning silence—an enormous hornet chirred. Mr. Kraggs hurried: Laurie was alone. His paws padded quickly along the pavement. It seemed as though the check had stopped rustling in his pocket; he paused to touch it— and heard faint, quaking little footsteps behind him: from a distance a shadow, timid and beaten, stretched towards him like a lost masterless little stray.

It became clear: this . . . this woman would follow him to the door, would stand or sit on the steps there all night, and altogether— something absurd, as in a dream.

Mr. Kraggs wiped his brow with a handkerchief, glanced back over his shoulder— then whisked into the first dark alley: to get to his house by way of the yard.

Groping along the sharp jagged brick, Mr. Kraggs found his gate and knocked. In the dark window of the bedroom, a face appeared, dimly white— it was, surely, the face of Mrs. Laurie. Mrs. Laurie cocked her arm and threw something out the window. What on earth was that all about?

Mr. Kraggs knocked for a long time, knocked louder and louder—the noise rebounding over all of Abbot Street—but the gate was not opened. Mr. Kraggs reflected on this situation and was trying to extract from his head at least something he could understand when, suddenly, right next to him, cast-iron footsteps stamped; window panes rattled, Mr. Kraggs's hat was knocked off, and—reaching for his hat—the minimonument fell to the pavement.

7.

On Sundays, when Mr. Kraggs was not at home, Mrs. Laurie had her mother and sister over.

At dusk they arrived from Whitechapel, knocked softly on the back gate and went through the kitchen to the dining room. In the metallic dining room they sat on the edges of chairs, hats on—drank tea and ate one slice of cake apiece.

"Now please, darlings, take some: I have another in the cupboard, a whole . . ." With a flourish, Mrs. Laurie opened the cupboard.

"No thanks. Really . . ." The guests' mouths watered, and they sat on edge, an ear cocked to the window so as not to miss the familiar padding of paws and to disappear into the kitchen in time. But only the rustle of countless wicker prams along the sidewalk could be heard.

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"You're so fortunate, Laurie . . ." the guests sighed, admiringly. "Do you remember how you used to go with us to market? . . . But now . . ."

The marbled Mrs. Laurie blushed: one so needs assurance from someone else that he is fortunate.

The three of them went to the bedroom. Mrs. Laurie put on the light, crystal pendants shone, eyes sparkled. On the bed, the chairs– inexpressibly lacy, white, gossamer.

"Come, Laurie, please do. In white you must truly look a queen."

Mrs. Laurie undressed behind the screen. She emerged– in black stockings, in shoes, and in the sheerest white: the warm marble of Mrs. Laurie showed dimly pink through the whiteness; the crystal pendants, turning pink, stirred; and the pink curtain on Mrs. Laurie's lips rapidly fluttered– almost parted in a breeze.

"You're so fortunate, Laurie," sighed the guests in admiration.

Below, someone knocked at the door. All three had the same thought: Kraggs.

"Good heavens, it's already dark, high time to be going home." The guests jumped up.

Mrs. Laurie hurriedly slipped on her white dressing gown, guided her mother and sister to the back door and opened it.

But it was not Kraggs: in the doorway stood a white-collared urchin with a parcel; simple-minded looking, he fumbled with his nose, but one mousy eye slyly squinted.

"For you, ma'm." He gave her the parcel.

In the parcel, as in last Sunday's, was a bouquet of tea roses, with petals protruding and bent back at the edges.

Mrs. Laurie flushed.

"Take them back." Angrily she poked them at the boy.

The boy squinted his eye even more:

"Cor, how come: the shop won't take them back, they've been paid for."

Mrs. Laurie ran up to the bedroom with the bouquet. The roses were full-bloomed; petals rained on the stairway; perplexed, Mrs. Laurie looked about. She thrust the bouquet under the mound of lace on the chair and went back downstairs, gathering petals along the way. She held out a thrupenny to the boy, trying to look up–away from his knowing screwed-up mousy eye.

Overhead was the black sky, tesselated with creeping white triangles and squares.

"Why yes, of course, the zeps are flying," the boy gaily answered Mrs. Laurie's raised eyebrows. "Any second now they'll start. Thank you, ma'm . . ." and he plunged off into the darkness.

Mrs. Laurie lowered the blinds in the dining room and– sheathed in a metallic radiance–hastened to put the celebrated spoons away in their separate coverlets: she had to go faster, before it began. At the sixth spoon, three castles on it–the city of Newcastle's coat-of-arms–a resounding echo. The spoon with three castles remained on the table beside an empty coverlet.

Dull cast-iron footsteps, crashing, trampled down–houses, people–closer and closer. Another step– and Mrs. Laurie's world would crumble: Kraggs, spoons, inexpressibly lacy . . .

To live–five minutes more. Must– that's the main thing.

"The bouquet . . . it's most important to chuck the bouquet . . ." Mrs. Laurie hurried to say to herself.

In the bedroom, she snatched the bouquet from the mound of lace.

"Why yes, into the yard. To him in the yard, to him, so that he . . ."

She leaned out the window, cocked her arm. The delirious geometric sky swept along, close– and in the next yard, a black figure, cut from swaying cardboard. Furiously Mrs. Laurie threw the bouquet right at his face and heard– perhaps in delirium–such absurd, childish, sniveling sobs. Stamping now, close by; splinters of glass tinkling: everything fell in; Mrs. Laurie's world was collapsing– spoons, lace.

"Bailey! Bailey!" The obliterated Mrs. Laurie flew headlong down the stairs and into the yard.

The delirious sky flickered. A black, absurdly thin figure flickered under the wall. And the tender foal-soft lips parted the curtain on the lips of Mrs. Laurie. To live– a minute more.

On the pavement strewn with coal dust, they lived a minute, a century, in the immortal raspberry universe. Somebody knocked and knocked on the gate. But in the distant raspberry universe it was not heard.

The lights died out. Stumbling on his paws in the shaggy darkness, crushing slivers of glass, Mr. Kraggs wandered through the rooms a long time, calling:

"Laurie! Where in the world are you, Laurie?"

The echoing cast-iron footsteps faded into the south and died away. Mr. Kraggs found, at last, a candle and ran upstairs to the bedroom.

And almost instantly, on the threshold behind him, appeared Mrs. Laurie.

"Good heavens! Where were you?" Mr. Kraggs turned on his pedestal. "My top hat . . . you see, see my top hat was knocked off . . ." Mr. Kraggs raised the candle and dropped his jaw: the white dressing gown was undone and, beneath it, the sheerest white– all torn and stained with coal dust. Tears on her eyelashes, but the lips . . .

No curtain.

"What's wrong? Are you . . . are you hurt, Laurie?"

"Yes. I mean no. Oh, no!" Mrs. Laurie began to laugh. "I only . . . Go out a minute, I'll change at once and come down to the dining room. I gather it's all over now."

Mrs. Laurie changed, gathered the petals from the floor and placed them in a small envelope, the envelope in a box. The cast-iron footsteps died away somewhere in the south. It was all over. □

London, 1917
Petersburg, 1918

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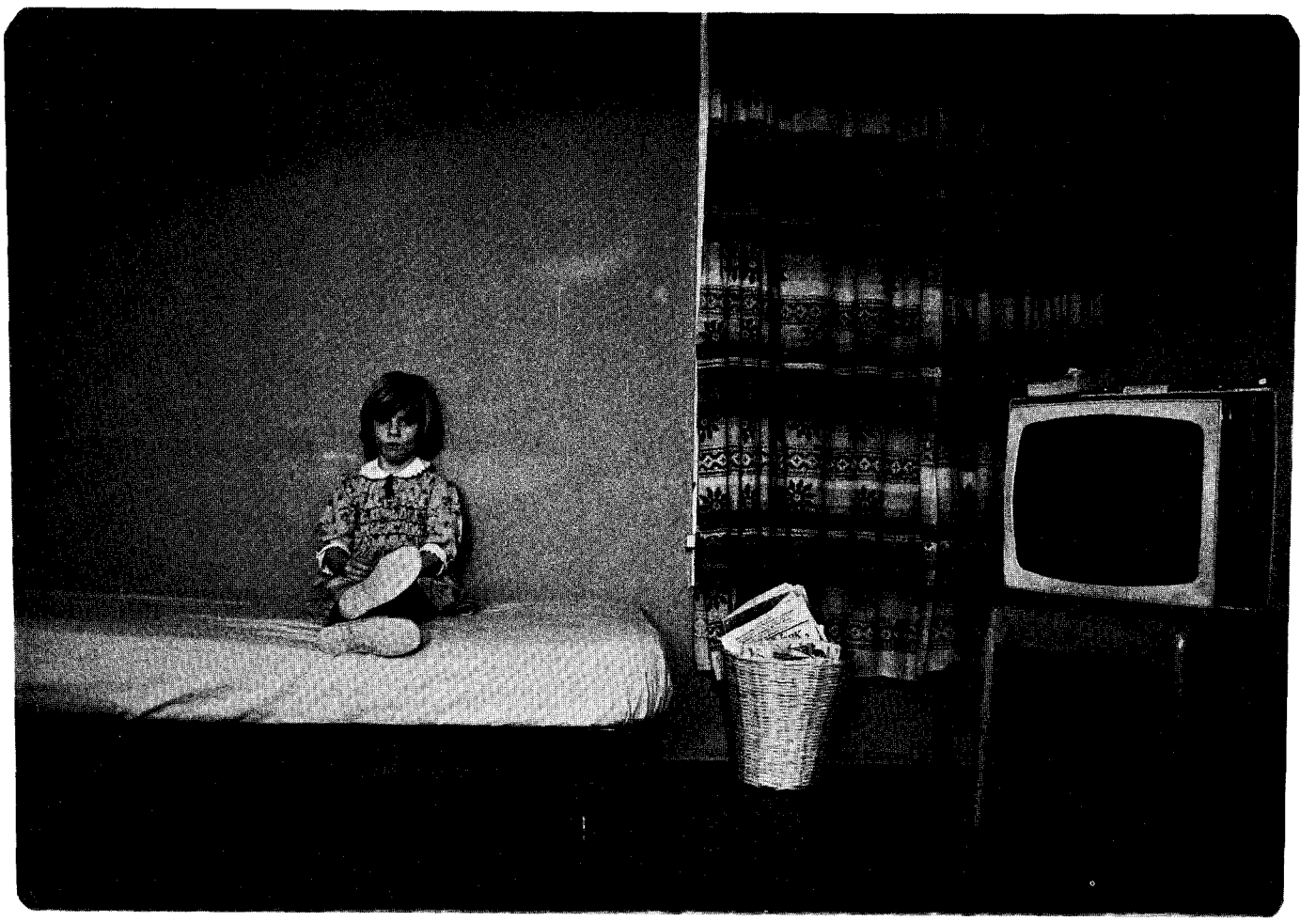

AMERICA OBSERVED

Poems by various hands

Photos by John Blasdel

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Jonathan Holden:

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1.

Tall, older than I,
that big kid on the mound
couldn't throw it through a
barn door. The whole barn
would cry, lie
softly down on itself in leaves.
He throws, but I can't see.
I'm just thankful I'm out,
on the bench again,
and only that barn is in pain.

2.

July. The big dipper is high.
I'm cold without my clothes.
I want to cover myself
with the blanket, but I can't.
She's older than I.
I hold one of her breasts
in my hand. It's dry
like a hornets' nest.
Why does she cry?

3.

The bat's too big for Eric.
I have to move up,
throw underhand. He
wallows at it, falls, the grass
nestles up to his ears. "Nice
try!" I call. And he picks himself
up. He believes me.

4.

She unhooks her bra. It
falls. Now she's all
there, as exposed to the air
as a raw, freshly-skinned potato,
tremblingly earnest, out of
breath, not because she's
hot but because she's
never done this before. She
loves me. She's scared.
I'll have to hold her, try
and warm her slowly
slowly slowly

BREAKING IN

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Gary Gildner:

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THE PHYSICAL EXAM

It's like being on the brink
of falling out of love,
you still have that knot
around your gut,
& the Matron of Inventory
strides in to run
down your heart
beat, bowels, etc.
In the end you feel like 2
for a quarter. Then
you are sent out to pee
in a bottle . . .
followed by Miss Needle
who wants to draw blood.
Since five o'clock this morning
she has been humming Barber's
"Adagio for Strings" & shows
little sign of chapping.
Her lips release the news that
your five vials will short-
ly be on their way
to Portland, & tested for no
less than 25 things.
Reduced to crabs
you undress.

The doctor arrives & peers
in your ears; he says
he had a great
BLT on toast for lunch.
Then he hits your knees,
squeezes your stomach & feels
between your toes.
You wonder what's up.
He mumbles moles, cancer –
then you know, better than you
ever knew your catechism,
that you're someone else, & dead.
You turn your head & cough.
He jabs his finger in your ass
& leaves.

You dress fast –
Miss Needle might come back,
"We need five vials for Aberdeen!"
& the Matron, maybe she'd
just as soon declare a total loss –

On the street you feel light.
Some kids are playing basketball.
You skip, suck air,
recall the night you scored
your forty points
& creamed those fairies from St. Agnes.

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Benjamin Saltman:

THE FATHERS

I see sparrow bones folded in their thin shoes
I hear their whistle like a toy bird
I see the clay in their foreheads
they gather and pull my house at the corners
they blockade the closets of children's clothes
I see them prepare for my journey
they ignore my wife's tears and her belly
they put their fingers in the soup
they dance in their black coats shaking the pictures
they say nothing will be forgotten
they say history is preparing a special for television
Bach and Jefferson are pressing their wigs in a leaf
in the vase on the sewing machine in the living room
they are smoke that curls out of corners
and the corners are gone and nothing is closed off
they say all are guilty no one is to blame

I see them work faster than flight crews a blur
they fill each brick with night
they lay the feathers to each shingle carefully
they set the heart at aerial rate
and bird calls rising from the open stove
the boards are pliable as skin
when the whole house rises with wires and pipes
to soar with me forever
while my face of yellow horn plunges in the wind

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Michael Ryan:

ONE STOP IN THE SNAKE HOUSE

In the glass case,
the snake, molded

strip of ancient
marble come to

life, loops itself
into one knot

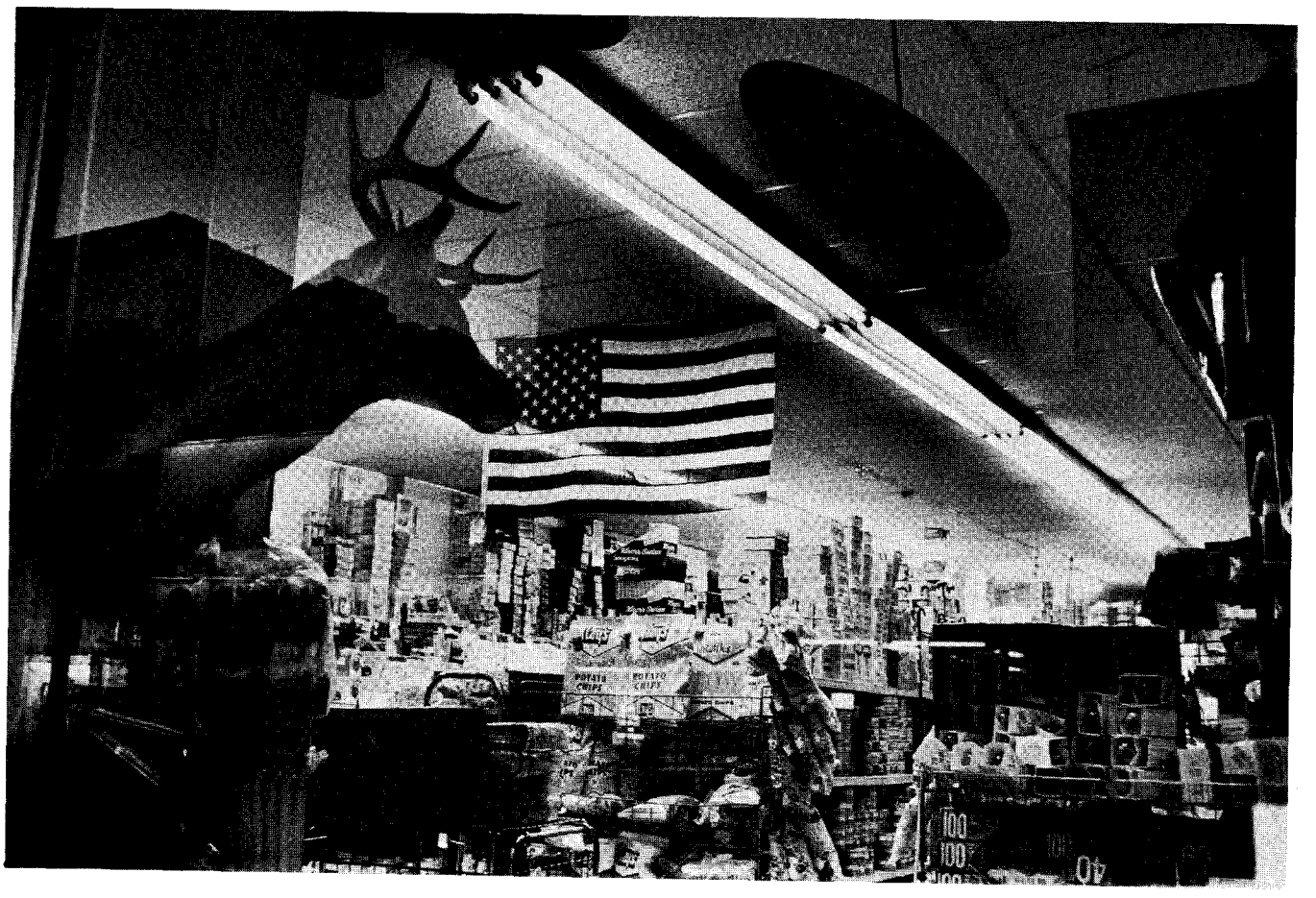
constantly. You
say "It seems to

look for its end"
then "I wonder

how the muscles
work" and press

my hand, meaning
Time to move on

or
I understand.



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Donald Justice:

Named ambassador
To the High Court of Prose,
I neglected my manners, my dress,
Spoke in a loud voice, at length,
And was everywhere taken
For one of the natives.

*

P. turns to poetry,
In search, once more,
Of the true primitive.

O Lord of the Red Feather,
May he locate the tribe,
Master the dialect.

*

Near the summit,
They rest on separate rocks, smoking,
And wonder whether the wildflowers
Are worth going on for.

*

G. maintains that somehow the Adjective can penetrate the Noun with all that is most private, thereby becoming the most Personal of the Parts of Speech, hence the most Beautiful. I, on the contrary, maintain that the Conjunction, being Impersonal, is the more Beautiful, and especially when suppressed.

*

M., opening my diary, found the pages blank.

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FROM A NOTEBOOK

*

Though, as G. says,
We American poets
No longer love words,
It is hard not to remember
What we felt for
Those that betrayed us,
Those we betrayed.

*

And D., they say, no longer
Hennas her nipples.

*

Wife now, mother of two,
In the soft light of five or six a.m.,
Shot through gauze,
Juliet still.

*

After the overture,
The opera seemed brief.

*

After the Chinese
Discs for a cough,
A smooth stone for remembrance.

And the man in the old song,
For a single quince out of season,
Sent back a poem that lasted
Ten thousand years.

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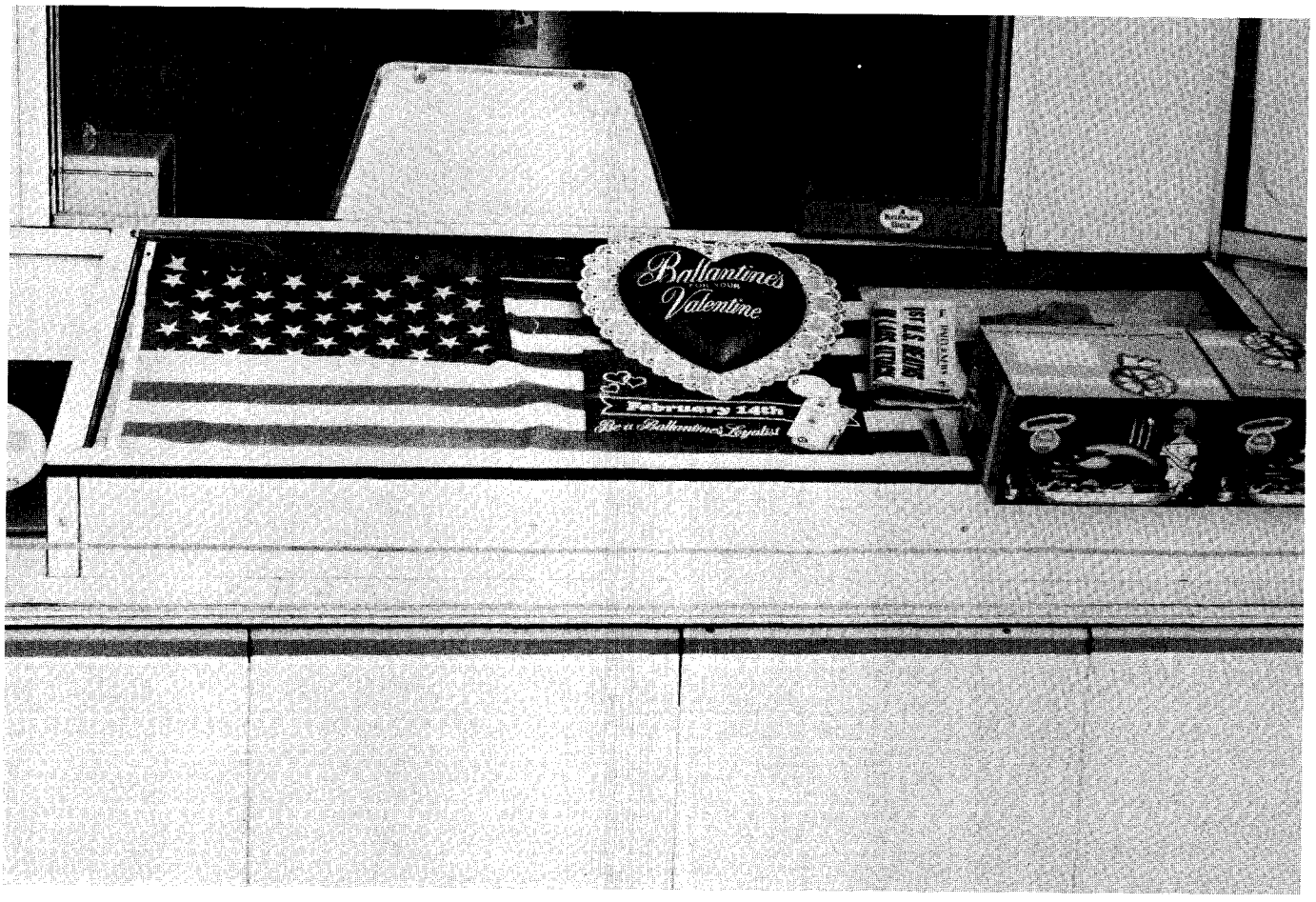
J. Johnston:



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THREE POEMS

1.

mornings
in bed
seem to be
one long state
of continual
readiness

mornings
I am
curled in
a tight ball
denying an
obscene stretch

mornings
bring a ritual
of urging
flannel
back down
into place

What are you doing
with yourself,
friends ask.

I entertained
myself
at age
32 early Sunday
morning.

2.

The friendly gynecologist
arms her with pills,
foam and the IUD
and tells her to be
comfortable in normal
heterosexual activity.
He pats her on the
breast and in robot
fashion spreads her
legs and says, "I'm
just going to touch you."
Oh please.

3.

you are shocked
you liked us both, you

were sure
this was just a game, you

knew I would
come to my senses, you

are full of admiration
for my courage, you

are threatened
it could happen, you

are generous
with your insight, you

are puzzled
I seem whole, I

can live with that.

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Robert Peters: YET AGAIN

that still point
that point
beyond the orange
girders, the steeples,
that still point
in the eye of
all those who feel
who've felt
they're anointed
peeling the last orange
peeling off their clothes
their eyes peeled
their intercostal muscles
the fibers of their hearts
their nerves

that still point

poised on an apex
of orange girders
among the grapes, jewels
clinging stuck
dangling
I balanced myself
this morning, sunday
wanting . . .

I have rejected the questions,
have buried them
like a cat about its business!

and, yet
there are flames
behind my head
burnings, scribblings
of some
unkempt hand
of a language I
can't read, of a
tongue I can't
understand. I
thought it had
to do with sex
anxiety
or the rope
of the self drawing
tighter always
about the throat
about the groin

the still point

on the girders
swaying above the
ocean & the curved
town my arms out
from my body at
right angles
I know my weight,
and my height.
My hair flows
in the wind. The
curve of the beach
is a perimeter, the
undulating clouds
another.
I am naked.
I am blind.
I won't come down.

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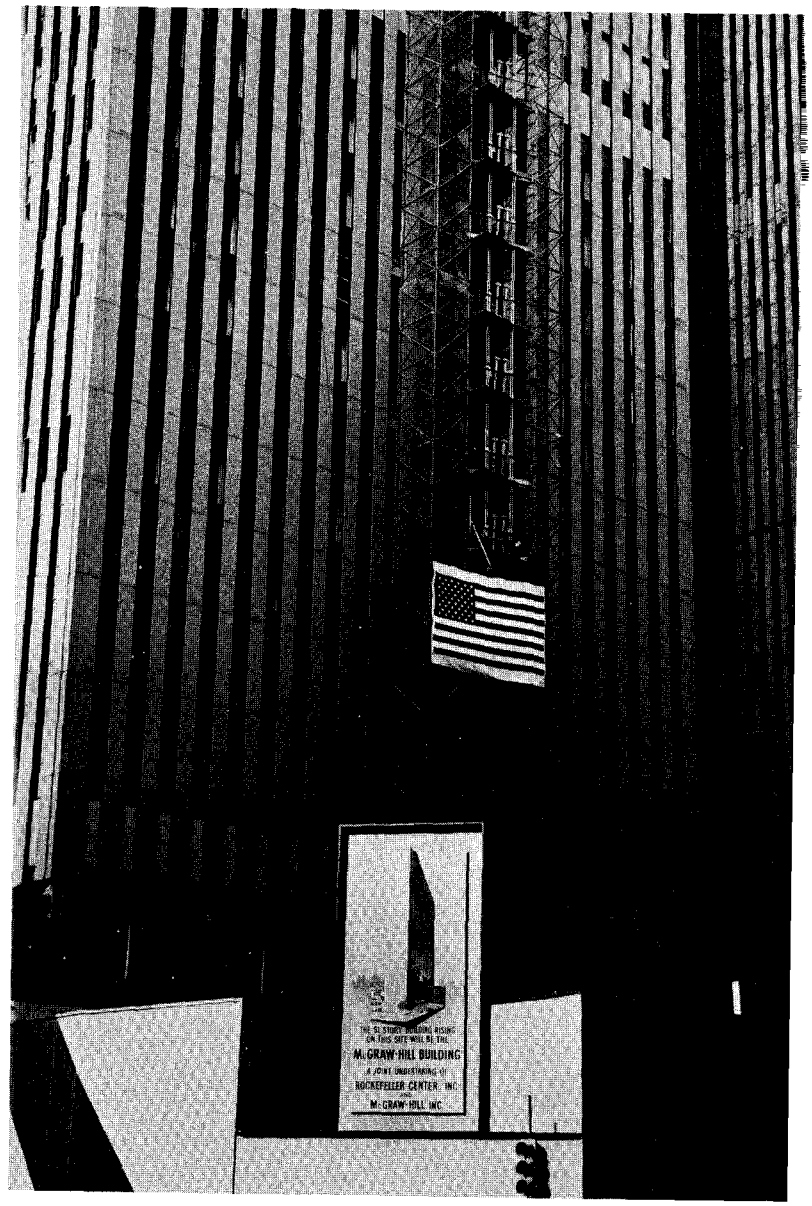
William Velde:

BARNUM & CO.



A wonder we last, troops free
from damage. No serious poem,
no lion's voice to swallow, I
need any prize for being wasted.

A bad comic will tell of picnics
on his childhood radio. It rained.
This is the roof of my mouth, scar
older than everything I can say.

Or not say. No innocence embarassing
enough to be called hell can be private,
not if I can help it. I'd rather ache
with the animals waiting in my throat.

This lion is a man swallowing his voice,
a hero whose cheerleaders are pure cake.
And my blue rage? A zoo full of children
like me, contagious with imaginary sweet.

Thanks for continuing to manufacture toys
we can swallow, animal crackers and rainy
Saturday mornings. And heroes we can see
still lagging the sky, asking for trouble.

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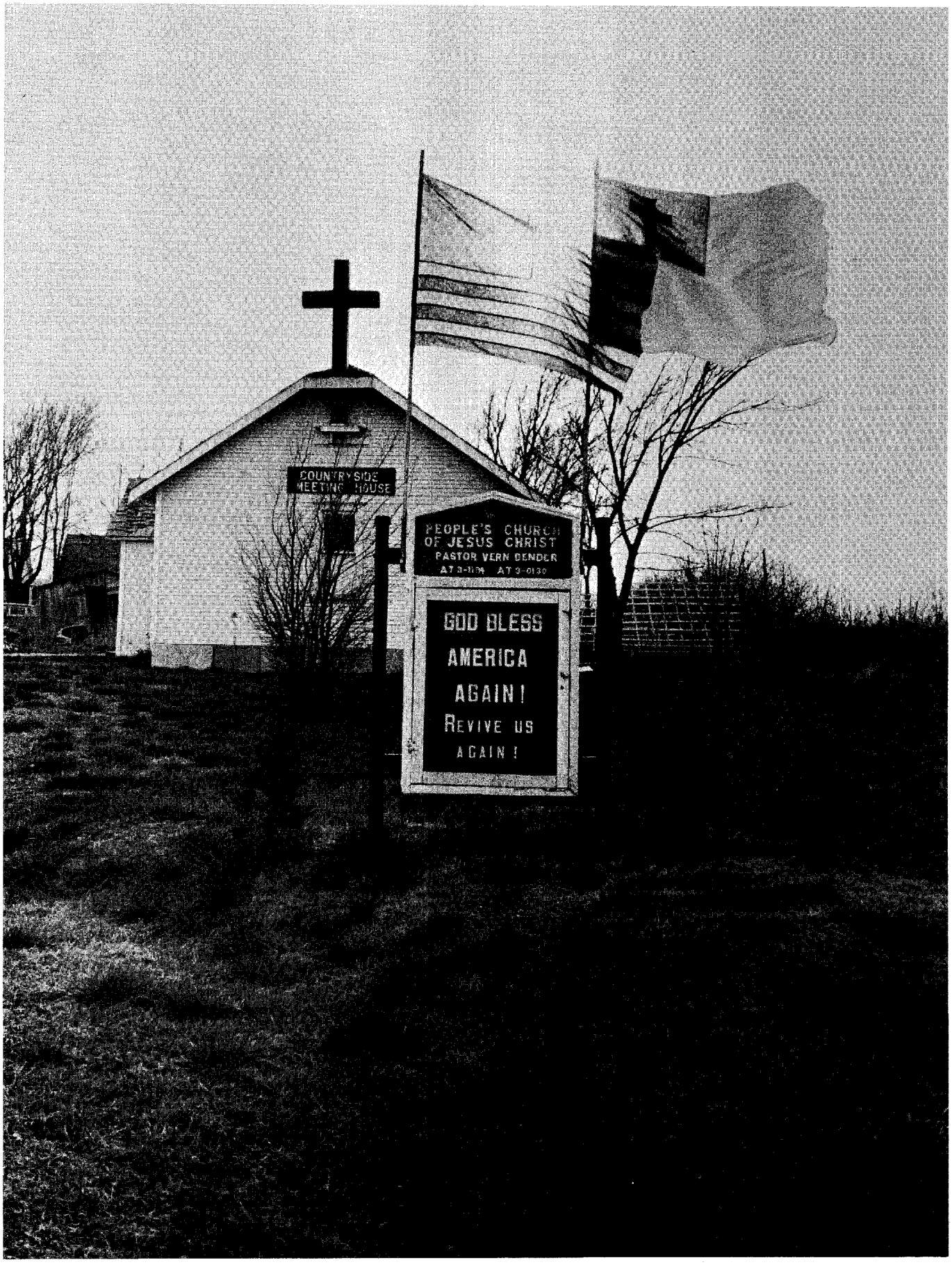

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Philip Levine:

NITRATE

They don't come back, he said.
Outside it was dinnertime,
and Granpa's wagon swayed
at the curb, the old gray
shaking his head from side to side
like he wanted to lie down
where the snows had burned off
and dark patches of ground shone.
The house was quiet
so Granpa told me everything
and I understood. They went in
but they never came out.
The hole in the earth
was what they called The Mines,
and that's where his little brother
went in to make his food.
There were horses too
burning up with their carts
like Granpa's bottle cart.
The walls were white as sugar,
soft, and the roots of trees
spun in your face. Granpa wiped
his forehead with the wool cap
and sat staring at the blue smoke
curling from his mouth and said
it was all for a dollar.
He didn't like to cry.
He bowed his head down
and hid his face in his hands,
so he never saw our favorite
Chinese elm out in the front yard
the green leaves hissing
and steaming like kettles.
A new spring was here
in the last slanting light,
the wren nest went up
in a moment of gold, the eggs
darkening like knuckles.
When the tree was gone
all that was left
was a little mound of salt.

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Kenneth Lash:
HUSH, HUSH

Look

my dog
chases a ball
and coughs
we are educated
beyond our capacity.
Our robbers
understand our cops.
The young
discover Jesus
and rock him

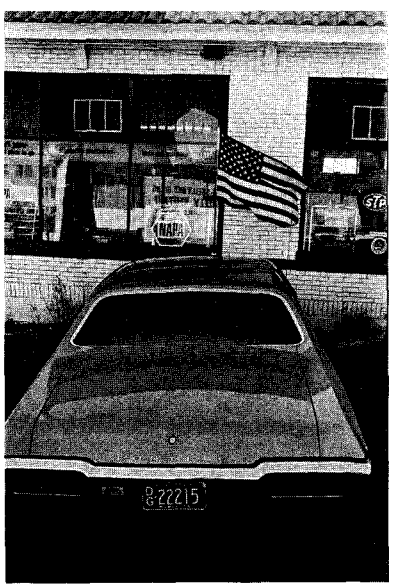
nevertheless

the water table
is settling, Indians
rising up
out of gas stations,

in the late afternoon
people in attics
rummaging,
Our
ancestors
gather in an office

Hush
says the doctor,
hush

Come,
die out.
Close your eyes
kiss somebody



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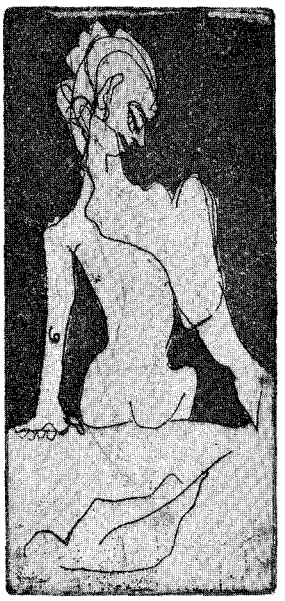

Stalking

A Story by Joyce Carol Oates

The Invisible Adversary is fleeing across a field.

Gretchen, walking slowly, deliberately, watches with her keen unblinking eyes the figure of the Invisible Adversary some distance ahead. The Adversary has run boldly in front of all that traffic—on long spiky legs brisk as colts' legs—and jumped up onto a curb of new concrete, and now is running across a vacant field. The Adversary glances over his shoulder at Gretchen.

Bastard, Gretchen thinks.

Saturday afternoon. November. A cold gritty day. Gretchen is out stalking. She has hours for her game. Hours. She is dressed for the hunt, her solid legs crammed into old blue jeans, her big, square, strong feet jammed into white leather boots that cost her mother forty dollars not long ago, but are now scuffed and filthy with mud. Hopeless to get them clean again, Gretchen doesn't give a damn. She is wearing a dark green corduroy jacket that is worn out at the elbows and the rear, with a zipper that can be zipped swiftly up or down, attached to a fringed leather strip.

She has hours ahead.

Cars and trucks and buses from the city and enormous interstate trucks hauling automobiles pass by on the highway; Gretchen waits until the way is nearly clear, then starts out. A single car is approaching. *Slow down, you bastard*, Gretchen thinks; and like magic he does.

Following the footprints of the Invisible Adversary. There is no sidewalk here yet, so she might as well cut right across the field. A gigantic sign announces the site of the new Pace & Fischbach Building, an office building of fifteen floors to be completed in 1973. The land around here is all dug up and muddy; she can see the Adversary's footsteps leading right past the gouged-up area . . . and there he is, smirking back at her, pretending panic.

I'll get you. Don't worry, Gretchen thinks carefully.

Because the Adversary is so light-footed and invisible, Gretchen doesn't make any effort to be that way. She plods along as she does at school, passing from classroom to classroom, unhurried and not even sullen, just unhurried. She knows she is very visible. She is thirteen years old and weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds. She's only five foot three—stocky, muscular, squat in the torso and shoulders, with good strong legs and thighs. She could be good at gym, if she bothered; instead, she just stands around, her face empty, her arms crossed and her shoulders a little slumped. If forced, she takes part in the games of volleyball and basketball, but she runs heavily, without spirit, and sometimes bumps into other girls, hurting them. *Out of my way*, she thinks; at such times her face shows no expression.

And now . . . ? The Adversary is peeking out at her from around the corner of a gas station. Something flickers in her brain. *I see you*, she thinks, with quiet excitement. The Adversary ducks back out of sight. Gretchen heads in his direction, plodding through a jumbled, bulldozed field of mud and thistles and debris that is mainly rocks and chunks of glass. The gas station is brand new and not yet opened for business. It is all white tile, white concrete, perfect plate glass windows with whitewashed X's on them, a large driveway and eight gasoline pumps, all proudly erect and ready for business. But the gas station has not opened since Gretchen and her family moved here—about six months ago. Something must have gone wrong. Gretchen fixes her eyes on the corner where the Adversary was last seen. He can't escape.

One wall of the gas station's white tile has been smeared with something like tar. Dreamy, snake-like, thick twistings of black. Black tar. Several windows have been broken. Gretchen stands in the empty driveway, her hands jammed into her pockets. Traffic is moving slowly over here. A barricade has been set up that directs traffic out onto the shoulder of the highway, on a narrow, bumpy, muddy lane that loops out and back again onto the pavement. Cars move slowly, carefully. Their bottoms scrape against the road. The detour signs are great rectangular things, bright yellow with black zigzag lines. SLOW. DETOUR. In the

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JOYCE CAROL OATES' newest fiction collection, which includes "Stalking," is entitled Marriages and Infidelities, *and will be published this summer by Vanguard.*

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two center lanes of the highway are bulldozers not being used today, and gigantic concrete pipes to be used for storm sewers. Eight pipes. They are really enormous; Gretchen's eyes crinkle with awe, just to see them.

She remembers the Adversary.

There he is—headed for the shopping plaza. *He won't get away in the crowds,* Gretchen promises herself. She follows. Now she is approaching an area that is more completed, though there are still no sidewalks and some of the buildings are brand-new and yet unoccupied, vacant. She jumps over a concrete ditch that is stained with rust-colored water, and heads up a slight incline to the service drive of the Federal Savings Bank. The drive-in tellers' windows are all dark today, behind their green-tinted glass. The whole bank is dark, closed. Is this the bank her parents go to, now? It takes Gretchen a minute to recognize it.

Now a steady line of traffic, a single lane, turns onto the service drive that leads to the shopping plaza. BUCKINGHAM MALL. 101 STORES. Gretchen notices a few kids her own age, boys or girls, trudging in jeans and jackets ahead of her, through the mud. They might be classmates of hers. Her attention is captured again by the Invisible Adversary, who has run all the way up to the Mall and is hanging around the entrance of the Cunningham Drug Store, teasing her.

You'll be sorry for that, you bastard, Gretchen thinks with a smile.

Automobiles pass her slowly. The parking lot for the Mall is enormous, many acres. A city of cars on a Saturday afternoon. Gretchen sees a car that might be her mother's, but she isn't sure. Cars are parked slanted here, in lanes marked LOT K, LANE 15. LOT K, LANE 16. The signs are spheres, bubbles, perched up on long slender poles. At night they are illuminated.

Ten or twelve older kids are hanging around the drugstore entrance. One of them is sitting on top of a mailbox, rocking it back and forth. Gretchen pushes past them —they are kidding around, trying to block people—and inside the store her eye darts rapidly up and down the aisles, looking for the Invisible Adversary.

Hiding here? Hiding?

She strolls along, cunning and patient. At the cosmetics counter a girl is showing an older woman some liquid make-up. She smears a small oval onto the back of the woman's hand, rubs it in gently. "That's Peach Pride," the girl says. She has shimmering blond hair and eyes that are pencilled to show a permanent exclamatory interest. She does not notice Gretchen, who lets one hand drift idly over a display of marked-down lipsticks, each for only $1.59.

Gretchen slips the tube of lipstick into her pocket. Neatly. Nimbly. Ignoring the Invisible Adversary, who is shaking a finger at her, she drifts over to the newsstand, looks at the magazine covers without reading them, and edges over to another display. Packages in a cardboard barrel, out in the aisle. Big bargains. Gretchen doesn't even glance in the barrel to see what is being offered . . . she just slips one of the packages in her pocket. No trouble.

She leaves by the other door, the side exit. A small smile tugs at her mouth.

The Adversary is trotting ahead of her. The Mall is divided into geometric areas, each colored differently; the Adversary leaves the blue pavement and is now on the green. Gretchen follows. She notices the Adversary going into a Franklin Joseph store.

Gretchen enters the store, sniffs in the perfumy, overheated smell, sees nothing that interests her on the counters or at the dress-racks, and so walks right to the back of the store, to the Ladies' Room. No one inside. She takes the tube of lipstick out of her pocket, opens it, examines the lipstick. It has a tart, sweet smell. A very light pink: *Spring Blossom.* Gretchen goes to the mirror and smears the lipstick onto it, at first lightly, then coarsely; part of the lipstick breaks and falls into a hair-littered sink. Gretchen goes into one of the toilet stalls and tosses the tube into the toilet bowl. She takes handfuls of toilet paper and crumples them into a ball and throws them into the toilet. Remembering the package from the drugstore, she takes it out of her pocket—just toothpaste. She throws it, cardboard package and all, into the toilet bowl, then, her mind glimmering with an idea, she goes to the apparatus that holds the towel—a single cloth towel on a roll—and tugs at it until it comes loose, then pulls it out hand over hand, patiently, until the entire towel is out. She scoops it up and carries it to the toilet. She pushes it in, and flushes the toilet.

The stuff doesn't go down, so she tries again. This time it goes partway down before it gets stuck. Gretchen leaves the restroom and strolls unhurried through the store. The Adversary is waiting for her outside—peeking through the window—wagging a finger at her. *Don't you wag no finger at me,* she thinks, with a small tight smile. Outside, she follows him at a distance. Loud music is blaring around her head. It is rock music, piped out onto the colored squares and rectangles of the Mall, blown everywhere by the November wind, but Gretchen hardly hears it.

Some boys are fooling around in front of the record store. One of them bumps into Gretchen and they all laugh as she is pushed against a trash can. "Watch it, babe!" the boy sings out. Her leg hurts. Gretchen doesn't look at them but, with a cold, swift anger, her face averted, she knocks the trash can over onto the sidewalk. Junk falls out. A can rolls. Some women shoppers scurry to get out of the way and the boys laugh.

Gretchen walks away without looking back.

She wanders through Sampson Furniture, which has two entrances. In one door and out the other, as always; it is a ritual with her. Again she notices the sofa that is like the sofa in their family room at home—covered with black-and-white fur, real goatskin. All over the store there are sofas, tables, chairs, beds. A jumble of furnishings. People stroll around them, in and out of little displays, displays meant to be living rooms, dining rooms, bedrooms, family rooms . . . . It makes Gretchen's eyes crinkle, to see so many displays: like seeing the insides of a hundred houses. She slows, almost comes to a stop. Gazing at a living room display on a raised platform. Only after a moment does she remember why she is here—who she is following—and she turns to see the Adversary beckoning to her.

She follows him outside again. He goes into Dodi's Boutique and, with her head lowered so that her eyes seem

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to move to the bottom of her eyebrows, pressing up against her forehead, Gretchen follows him. *You'll regret this,* she thinks. Dodi's Boutique is decorated in silver and black. Metallic strips hang down from a dark ceiling, quivering. Salesgirls, dressed in pants-suits, stand around with nothing to do except giggle with one another and nod their heads in time to the music, amplified throughout the store. It is music from a local radio station. Gretchen wanders over to the dress rack, for the hell of it. Size 14. "The time is now 2:35," a radio announcer says cheerfully. "The weather is 32 degrees with a chance of showers and possible sleet tonight. You're listening to WCKK, Radio Wonderful . . . ." Gretchen selects several dresses and a salesgirl shows her to a dressing room.

"Need any help?" the girl asks. She has long swinging hair and a high-shouldered, indifferent, bright manner.

"No," Gretchen mutters.

Alone, Gretchen takes off her jacket. She is wearing a navy blue sweater. She zips one of the dresses open and it falls off the flimsy plastic hanger before she can catch it. She steps on it, smearing mud onto the white wool. *The hell with it.* She lets it lie there and holds up another dress, gazing at herself in the mirror.

She has untidy, curly hair that looks like a wig set loosely on her head. Light brown curls spill out everywhere, bouncy, a little frizzy, a cascade, a tumbling of curls. Her eyes are heavy set, her eyebrows heavy and dark. She has a stern staring look, like an adult man. Her nose is perfectly formed, neat and noble. Her upper lip is long, as if the lips were stretched to close with difficulty, over the front teeth. She wears no make-up, her lips are perfectly colorless, pale, a little chapped, and they are usually held tight, pursed tightly shut. She has a firm, rounded chin. Her facial structure is strong, pensive, its features stern and symmetrical as a statue's, blank, neutral, withdrawn. Her face is attractive. But there is a blunt, neutral, sexless stillness to it, as if she were detached from it and somewhere else, uninterested.

She holds the dress up to her body, smooths it down over her breasts, staring.

After a moment she hangs the dress up again, and runs the zipper down roughly so that it breaks. The other dress she doesn't bother with. She leaves the dressing room, putting on her jacket.

At the front of the store the salesgirl glances at her. "—didn't fit—?"

"No," says Gretchen.

She wanders around for a while, in and out of the Mall's big famous store, Carmichael's, where she catches sight of her mother on an escalator going up. Her mother doesn't notice her. She pauses by a display of "winter homes." Her family owns a home like this, in the Upper Peninsula, except theirs is larger. This one comes complete for only $5330: PACKAGE ERECTED ON YOUR LOT—YEAR-ROUND HOME FIBERGLASS INSULATION—BEAUTIFUL ROUGH-SAWN VERTICAL B. C. CEDAR SIDING WITH DEEP SIMULATED SHADOW LINES FOR A RUGGED EXTERIOR.

Only 3:15. For the hell of it, Gretchen goes into the Big Boy restaurant and orders a ground-round hamburger with French fries. Also a Coke. She sits at the crowded counter and eats slowly, her jaws grinding slowly, as she glances at her reflection in the mirror directly in front of her—her mop of hair moving almost imperceptibly with the grinding of her jaws—and occasionally she sees the Adversary waiting outside, coyly. *You'll get yours,* she thinks.

She leaves the Big Boy and wanders out into the parking lot, eating from a bag of potato chips. She wipes her greasy hands on her thighs. The afternoon has turned dark and cold. Shivering a little, she scans the maze of cars for the Adversary—yes, there he is—and starts after him. He runs ahead of her. He runs through the parking lot, waits teasingly at the edge of a field, and as she approaches he runs across the field, trotting along with a noisy crowd of four or five loose dogs, who don't seem to notice him.

Gretchen follows him through that field, trudging in the mud, and through another muddy field, her eyes fixed on him. Now he is at the highway—hesitating there—now he is about to run across in front of traffic—now, now—now he darts out—

Now! He is struck by a car! His body knocked backward, spinning backward. Ah, now, *now how does it feel?* Gretchen asks.

He picks himself up. Gets to his feet. Is he bleeding? Yes, bleeding! He stumbles across the highway to the other side, where there is a sidewalk. Gretchen follows him as soon as the traffic lets up. He is staggering now, like a drunken man. *How does it feel? Do you like it now?*

The Adversary staggers along the sidewalk. He turns onto a side street, beneath an archway. *Piney Woods.* He is leading Gretchen into the Piney Woods sub-division. Here, the homes are quite large, on artificial hills that show them to good advantage. Most of the homes are white colonials with attached garages. There are no sidewalks here, so the Adversary has to walk in the street, limping like an old man, and Gretchen follows him in the street, with her eyes fixed on him.

Are you happy now? Does it hurt? Does it?

She giggles at the way he walks. He looks like a drunken man. He glances back at her, white-faced, and turns up a flagstone walk . . . . goes right up to a big white colonial house . . . .

Gretchen follows him inside. She inspects the simulated brick of the foyer: yes, there are blood spots. He is dripping blood. Entranced, she follows the splashes of blood into the hall, to the stairs . . . . forgets her own boots, which are muddy . . . but she doesn't feel like going back to wipe her feet. The hell with it.

Nobody seems to be home. Her mother is probably still shopping, her father is out of town for the weekend. The house empty. Gretchen goes into the kitchen, opens the refrigerator, takes out a Coke, and wanders to the rear of the house, to the family room. It is two steps down from the rest of the house. She takes off her jacket and tosses it somewhere. Turns on the television set. Sits on the goatskin sofa and stares at the television: a re-run of a Shotgun Steve show, which she has already seen. But the hell with it.

If the Adversary comes crawling behind her, groaning in pain, weeping, she won't even bother to glance at him. □

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The South Malaysia Pineapple Growers' Association

A Story by Paul Theroux

They had a drama society, but it was not called The South Malaysia Pineapple Growers' Drama Society; it was The Footlighters, it met on Wednesday evenings in the club lounge, and the Official Patron was the Sultan. He seldom came to the plays and never to the club. It was just as well, the Footlighters said; when the Sultan was at the theater you couldn't drink at the bar between the acts, which was why most of the audience came, anyway the men; and Angela Miller, who drove down from Layang every Wednesday, said the Sultan was a frightful old bore whose single interest was polo.

An effortlessly deep-voiced woman, much more handsome at forty-five than she had been pretty at twenty, Angela had played a Wilde heroine six years before—that was in Kota Bahru—and found the role so agreeable, so suited to her temper, that in moments of stress she became that heroine; telling a story, she used the heroine's inflections and certain facial expressions, especially incredulity. Often, it allowed her to manage her anger.

It was Angela who told the story about Jan's first visit to the club. Jan had looked at the photographs on the wall of the bar and then sat in a lounge chair sipping her gimlet while other members talked. Only Angela had seen Jan rush to the window and exclaim, "What a *lovely* time of day!"

"All I could see were the tennis courts," said Angela, later; "but little Jan said, 'Look at the air—it's like *silk*.'"

Jan was new, not only to the club and the Footlighters, but to Klang, where her her husband had just been posted to cut down a rubber estate and oversee the planting of oil palms.

"Anyone," said Angela, "who spends that long looking out the window *has* to be new to Klang. *I* look out and don't see a blessed thing!"

It had happened only the previous week. Already it was one of Angela's stories; she had a story to explain the behavior of every Footlighter and, it was said, every planter family. That exclamation at sundown was all the Footlighters knew of Jan on the evening they met to pick a new play. She was a pale young girl, perhaps twenty-six, with a small head and a very young baby. Some of the male Footlighters had spoken to Jan's husband; they had found him hearty, with possibilities back-stage, but mainly interested in fishing.

Angela was chairing the meeting, they had narrowed the selection to *Private Lives* and *The World of Suzie Wong*, and before anyone asked her opinion, Jan said, "We did *Private Lives* in Nigeria." It was an innocent remark, but Jan was slightly nervous and gave it a dogmatic edge, which surprised the rest into silence.

"Oh, really?" said Angela in her intimidating bass after a pause. She trilled the "r" as she would have done on stage, and she glared at Jan.

"Yes, um," said Jan. "I played Amanda. Bill helped with the sets." She smiled and closed her eyes, remembering. "What a night that was. It rained absolute *buckets*."

"Maybe we should put it on here," said Duff Gillespie. "We need some rain over at my place."

Everyone laughed, Angela loudest of all. And Jan said, earnestly, "It's a very witty play. Two excellent women's parts and lots of good lines."

"Epicene," said Tony Evans, pronouncing it *eppy-seen.*

"I've noticed," said Henry Eliot, a white-haired man who usually played fathers, "that when you use a big word, Tony, you never put it in a sentence. It's rather cowardly."

"That's who we're talking about," said Tony, affecting, rather than speaking in, the Welsh accent that was natural to him. "Noel Coward."

"Too-shay," said Duff, "pardon my French."

Jan had looked from face to face; she wondered whether they were making fun of her.

"That settles it," said Angela. "*Suzie Wong* it is."

"When did we decide that?" asked Henry, making a face.

"You didn't" said Angela, "*I* did. We can't have squabbles." She smiled at Jan. "You'll find me fantastically dictatorial, my dear. Pass me that script, would you, darling?" Angela took the grey booklet that Tony Evans had been flipping through. She put it on the table, opened it decisively to *Cast, In Order of Their Appearance*, and ran the heel of her hand down the fold, flattening it. She said, "Now for the cast."

At eleven-thirty, all the main parts had been allotted. "Except one," said Jan.

"I beg your pardon," said Angela.

"I mean, it's all set, isn't it? Except that we haven't"—

PAUL THEROUX is presently in London; he will teach at the University of Virginia this fall. Houghton Mifflin is publishing his new short story collection, Sinning with Annie, *in October.*

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she looked at the others—"we haven't decided the biggest part, have we?"

Angela gave Jan her look of incredulity. She did it effectively, and it made Jan pause and know she had said something wrong. So Jan laughed, it was a nervous laugh, and she said, "I mean, who's Suzie?"

"Who indeed?" said Henry in an Irish brogue. He took his pipe out of his mouth to chuckle; then he returned the pipe and the chuckling stopped. He derived an unusual joy from watching two women disagree. His smile was like triumph.

"You've got your part," said Angela, losing control of her accent. "I should say it's a jolly good one."

"Oh, I know that! But I was wondering about—" Jan looked at the table. She said, "I take it you're going to play Suzie."

"Unless anyone has any serious objections," said Angela. No one said a word. Angela addressed her question to Jan. "Do *you* have any serious objections?"

"Well, not *serious* objections," said Jan, trying to sound good-humored.

"Maybe she thinks—" Duff started.

Angela interrupted, "Perhaps I'm too old for the part, Jan, is that what you're trying to say?"

"God, not that," said Jan becoming discomposed. "Honestly Angela, I think you're perfect for it, really I do."

"What is it then?"

Jan seemed reluctant to begin, but she had gone too far to withdraw. Her hands were clasped in her lap and now she was speaking to Duff, whose face was the most sympathetic. "I don't want to make this sound like an objection, but the point is, Suzie is supposed to be, well, *Chinese* . . . and, Angela, you're not, um, Chinese. Are you?"

"Not as far as I know," said Angela, raising a laugh. The laughter subsided. "But I *am* an actress."

"I know that," said Jan, "and I'm dead sure you'd do a marvellous Suzie." Jan became eager. "I'm terribly excited about this production, really I am. But what if we got a Chinese girl from town to play Suzie? I mean, a *real* Chinese girl, with one of those dresses slit up the side and that long black hair and that sort of slinky—"

Angela's glare prevented Jan from going any further.

"It's a challenging role," said Angela, switching her expression to one of keen interest. "But so are they all, and we mustn't weaken. Henry is going to play the old Chinese man. Would you prefer that Stanley did it?"

Stanley Chee, a man of sixty, with gold-rimmed glasses, was the Head Boy of the club, and at that moment he could be seen—all heads turned—through the bar door, looking furtive as he wiped a bottle.

Jan shook her head.

"It's going to be a hard grind," said Angela, and she smiled. "But that's what acting is. Being someone else. Completely. That's what I tell all the new people." □

DAVE ETTER

LOVERS' QUARREL

The moving face of the Ausagaunaskee River,
as I gaze at it in this summer twilight,
is not the face of a drowned boy
who went wading a little too far
with cane pole, or hound dog,
nor the face of the drunk from out of town
who fell off the railroad bridge one spring night
after losing at poker, or was it pool?
No, there are no haunting faces here,
no one to remember, no one to grieve for.
But back beyond weeping willow shadows,
a gravel road, and withered catalpa blossoms,
is the face of an unhappy country girl,
red-eyed now over a packed suitcase,
hoping to catch the next bus for Mendota
so she can tell Mama and Papa
what a mean mouth she got married to.

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Hugh Ogden: THE TURNING

(Meditation on a Theme from Pablo Neruda)

I

Southward behind me
the rocks. A long meadow for grazing eludes
the light, below ground, fields
of jasmine and sky, a limpid childhood
of sunflower and sand. Who was I,
I in my other being?

In that calm iridescence
of air a child raced a bike to the river
plunging into water. Plumes loose
and wing spare an egret circled into a ring
of sun, into the blue rounded
ocean. Children swapped

marbles and laughed,
secluded in abandoned barns, self after self
delighting in day, not one but myriad
changing as seasons change, petal by petal
and leaf by leaf. They possessed
their own beginning.

It was the other who
came, passed so swiftly in a sudden storm
they knew nothing, came in disguise
silently a gypsy moth climbing higher by day
into leaves preparing for darkness,
biding his time and waiting.

II

The child's face altered,
his bones steadied, his feet guided by
flesh and the footfall of others,
his eyes, the lilt of his walk, his hands
engraving love in summer rain, his
smile left in schoolrooms, all all grew
together a garment of transparency
a man puts on like a fugitive
gesture of loneliness,
intimate and simple.

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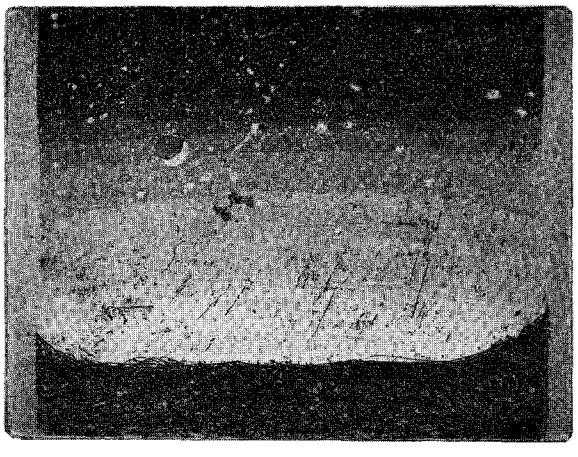
III

Later I came North to
the city, to deep wells of oil and wreckage,
women who sought themselves in my
reflection, vacantly obsessive as though
they had lost themselves there.
But I was lost not they,

plodding along streets
no longer present and misplaced houses.
Hundreds looked at me, their
hair tangled and their eyes of charcoal.
I looked back a stranger out
of my face seeing

nothing, the eye that
had grown together beyond all changing and
perishing. Sometimes I remembered
as a suppliant remembers the iris radiant
or the finch embracing the earth,
the purely born son.

There was something I
wanted, looking away, some acknowledgement
that he had once spoken with my tongue,
that he was there in the pasture below the sea
like an open pomegranate full
of stars.



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A STORY BY DAVID MADDEN

A Part in Pirandello

"Well, Mr. Cameron, as of now," said Mr. McMillan, letting the research paper slip from his hand, flop on the desk, "you've earned a D-minus in the course."

As Brent stared at "Extinct Volcanoes in the Orient" A+, his stomach felt as it did the time he rose against the wobbling of the vaulting pole and crashed his head backward against the cross-bar. At the expression on Brent's face, McMillan flinched.

"But sir, that's what I had *before.* I thought this paper. . ."

"I *know* you did." The office was so cramped their knees almost touched. "Compared with your earlier themes, this research paper shows a remarkable improvement in your ability to think, to organize your thoughts, and to express them." Looking narrow-eyed and quizzically into Brent's eyes, McMillan waited for him to respond.

Brent shrugged, closed his eyes. McMillan was a good teacher, a good man, but as he had said the first day of class, "When it comes to cheating, I'm a bastard." Brent *wanted* him to be a bastard, so he could confess, rid himself of the stranger in him who had turned to Kester for help. The doubts about Kester that had worried Brent even back in their early high school days in Ironton made this unconfessed crime twice repugnant. He wished he could vomit. When he opened his eyes, he would confess, and be free of the something about Kester that nagged him, too. They would kick him out of Melbourne, but kick him out clean, not secretly covered with slime. He never minded fumbling passes, placing third, missing baskets *in public*, because it was in public that he was always striving to make touchdowns, break finish tapes, make baskets, and sometimes did. But private, secret thorns festered.

Licking his lips, Brent opened his eyes. "Sir—"

"Mis—" McMillan stuck up a finger to stop him, "—ter Cameron, I *know* what this means to you. Loss of the sports scholarship, which means, for a young man from a steel town, being dropped from school—and into Vietnam. Going to be a dentist, weren't you?"

"Well, sir," said Brent, untangling his twisted fingers and spreading his hands apart, "the way things look *now*. . ."

"Something just occurred to me. A way to make up for this. You hear about the play I'm directing?"

"No, sir."

"Oh." A flicker of contempt. "Well, it's by Pirandello, *It Is So! (If You Think So)*, sometimes translated *Right You Are, If You Think You Are.* Mysterious. Not a mystery—*psychologically* mysterious. Now, I've got some town ladies coming in to do the older women's parts, but I don't have a tall, beautiful girl to do Signora Ponza, wife of the new secretary of the provincial council. . . . She doesn't appear until the climax of the play for about three minutes, and she's wearing a black veil over her face until her last line: *'No! I am she whom you believe me to be.'* Now, you could memorize a few brief speeches like that, couldn't you?"

"Sir, I don't see. . ."

"Simple. I would feel justified in giving you credit in this course for work done in the play."

"You want me—to—dress—up?"

"Crude way to put it, Mr. Cameron. This is not a fraternity romp. This is a serious, though witty, play. One of my favorites, in fact. You would impersonate a young woman, as convincingly as possible."

"*I* can't act, sir."

McMillan looked into his eyes. Brent tried not to blink. "Mr. Cameron, you are acting right at this moment."

"Sir—"

"Don't push it."

Brent *wanted* to push it—out. Out into the open. Be done with it. I'm guilty—on with the punishment. Though McMillan's reputation as a bastard about cheating had been justified in every instance, he treated each case individually, and always put the culprit through the kind of hell he brought on himself. The student who tried to bluff all the

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way went out on his ear. If he confessed, he failed the course instantly, but was often persuaded to venture upon creative, sometimes profound alternatives for atoning with himself for his crime. Some of these students achieved great things during their chosen method of atonement, and ended up loving McMillan. Brent felt his own spirit go out to such possibilities. But *this* proposal did not at all resemble the kind of intricate moral situations Brent had heard tales of.

"You're worried about the other boys, right? Well, don't. I'll announce that a mystery woman, an old actress friend of mine, is coming to play the part."

"But, sir, the guys'll find out somehow."

Brent saw in his eyes that McMillan was still a step ahead of him. Brent wished he could get on his feet, move around. If they were on a basketball court instead of this tiny, closed room where they consciously had to avoid each other's knees, his mind might out-maneuver McMillan's.

"We'll have closed rehearsals, about midnight, just for your part. *I* don't want anybody to know. So together we'll keep this concealed until the moment you step out onto that stage."

"—and fall flat on my face."

"*I'll* be damned. Look, I haven't watched you on the basketball court, but I see you in the halls and on campus, walking. You don't even *sit* like the others. There's a *something* that I *know* I can get in shape, and it'll knock them out of their seats. You know, in the Greek theatre, boys always played the female roles. Your great, athletic Greeks. Some young hero at Marathon or Thermopylae could have played Electra the spring before in Athens. Use your imagination, Cameron. Move a while in another dimension of yourself. . . . As you seem to have done in the style of this research paper."

"They'll recognize my face."

"Makeup is a mask. And it won't be *you* behind the mask."

"You make it sound so easy."

"Then you're not listening to what I *don't* say. Learning to walk like a lady will be very difficult. But when you go on that stage, you'll be Signora Ponza."

"And there's no *girl* who's right for the part?"

"I've beaten the bushes from one end of the county to the other. I was just about to switch to another play, when, suddenly, there *you* were, with your extinct volcanoes, your D-minus, and your dilemma."

Coach MacFarland patted his buttocks as he passed, and Brent felt light as a crane, listening to the ball he had hook-shot into the basket bounce behind him as he ran out to receive again.

"What're *you* doing here?"

Kester stood between the collapsible bleachers back under the exit sign, holding his books against his chest, watching.

"Just wondering how you made out, Old Sport."

"McMillan gave me A-plus on the damned paper."

"Watch it!"

The blow against the side of his head made Brent go black a moment, then he chased the bouncing ball, blinking into clear vision as it rolled back toward him from the wall by the water fountain.

Brent had never entered Memorial Theatre through the *front* door, much less the back. He had missed, with little regret, two plays, one of them a required Shakespeare. Five minutes early, keeping in the shadows of the shrubs and trees close to the wall, Brent circled the building, unable to discover even a faint night light. No moon, no stars, pitch black, the bite of November in the air.

The stage door slipped open so easily he almost flung it into his own face. A light on an iron stanchion lit the stage. Used to a gleaming court, a well-lighted hive of faces, colorfully clothed bodies suddenly jumping to their feet, Brent stepped into the glare, feeling black purple velvet hanging around him. He squinted at the darkness beyond the stage, suddenly imagining the audience that, two weeks from Friday, would fill the theatre.

"Jesus, Mr. Cameron, you scared the hell out of me!"

"Sorry, sir, I just thought I'd better slip in."

"I'm over *here*. By the exit light."

"What do I do now, sir?"

"Take off your windbreaker."

Though it seemed he had spent most of his life undressing in front of men, Brent felt as if he were stripping nude before the whole school. Affecting nonchalance, he let the jacket dangle by his thumb over his shoulder.

"Now, walk upstage." Brent walked up to the dark footlights. "I'm sorry. *Up*stage means toward the rear." Brent's tennis shoes bumped together, squeaked, as he turned. "And spread the curtains a little to improvise an entrance." Smothery darkness between the velvet curtain and the wall he sensed but could not see. Heavy velvet muffled McMillan's voice: "Now, step out and walk very slowly, but in your natural gait, toward the footlights, *down*-stage." Trying to imitate a girl, Brent waddled to the center of the stage before McMillan stopped him. "Mr. Cameron, toss the jacket aside. Now, listen, carefully. Walk *naturally*." Brent remembered that McMillan had said "your natural gait." "We've got plenty of time."

"Sorry, sir." Brent went behind the curtains again.

"I had the boys strip the stage. I want us to start from nothing and gradually work up to Signora Ponza's entrance opening night."

Mac, does *he* have to be here?"

"Who?"

"Kester Dunlap."

Coach MacFarland looked around and stopped to get Kester, perched on the top bench of the collapsible bleachers, in focus. "Didn't even *see* him."

"You look around and suddenly he's there. Gives me the creeps."

"Well, you boys could do with an audience, couldn't you? Pre-game cheering section?"

"Practice ought to be closed to outsiders."

"Well, it ain't, Brent, so show him what you can do."

Brent made three baskets in a row, and on his way to the showers, some of the guys gave him a pat and his roommate gave him a quick hug as he passed.

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Again."

Anger almost suffocating him, Brent stood behind the dusty velvet curtain, waiting for McMillan to cue him.

" '*You must not irritate him. You must leave him alone. Oh, please!*'. . . We're waiting, Mr. Cameron."

Brent walked out. Even with the rehearsal chairs, the stage felt empty, as though he slogged through a field of sludge.

Out there in the dark, McMillan beat on the back of a seat with a pencil. Brent wished he could see the man. He was never where the sound seemed to come from. Maybe it was part of his directing technique, like some of the tricks MacFarland used. The last tap of the pencil was like a pistol shot at the end of a quarter.

"Mr. Cameron."

"Sir?"

"I can't help but wonder whether you're trying to convince me that you're all wrong for this part."

"I'm trying to do what you tell me to, sir."

"Yes, Mr. Cameron, you *are* doing what I tell you to. But that's *all* you're doing."

"I don't know what else to *do*."

"Have you read the play yet?"

"No, sir, I had to study for a psych test."

"Read it. This weekend. Think about it. And I'll see you Monday."

Brent slept through most of the weekend. He could master himself enough to open the book, then fall asleep after every five pages. During long lapses into stupor, he stared at the black, purple, green, and white cover: *Naked Masks/ Five Plays/ By Luigi Pirandello.*

Brent wished his roommate had not gone away to visit his girl. With his roommate's Hendrix record going, Brent would have had an excuse for not concentrating. No parties at Melbourne that weekend either. No games. Only Pirandello and assignments in four courses, including McMillan's English class. An interpretation of "The Force That Through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower"—whatever the hell that meant. Dylan Thomas' phrases made Brent's head feel as though his body were adrift in a tiny boat.

He wrote to his mother, but didn't feel at all like writing to his father.

So far Brent had only practiced walking, hardly listening to McMillan reel off the lines. At three a.m. Monday morning, he finally read up to the scene he had dreaded: "*Signora Ponza* (turning her veiled head with a certain austere solemnity toward her husband). Don't be afraid!" Suddenly, the fact that he would have to speak like a woman struck him. The sound of his voice as he tried to speak her next speech nauseated him: "*Signora Ponza* (having looked at them through her veil, speaking with dark solemnity). What else do you want of me, after this, ladies and gentlemen? There is a misfortune here, as you see, which must stay hidden; otherwise the remedy which our compassion has found cannot avail." But as he read the rest of her six brief speeches, Brent felt more composed.

"You have to admit," he said, to his face in the mirror over the washroom sink, "It's kinda interesting."

At breakfast, he sat with the boys on the team, laughing so hard at their dirty jokes that he cried, almost hysterically. Seeing the tears, they pointed at him and pretended to jeer as he wiped them away. A hive of nerves, knowing he must sit still and collect himself, he let the boys drift off in groups, until he was alone at the messy table.

"I got an A in Seventeenth Century."

Brent's flesh jumped. He turned toward the table behind, and Kester's face, twisted around on the stalk of his neck, was only a foot away.

"Great." Kester had tested out of freshman English.

"You'd probably get an A, too, if you were in there with *me*."

"I'd regret it, too."

"Don't *be* that way, Brent, hell, we're from the same home town."

"That's an accident."

"True, we didn't choose to be born in Ironton, but that we went to kindergarten, grammar school, junior high, high school, and now to one of the best men's colleges in the country together can't be ruled out as superfluous."

"Stop pretending you like sports so much! And stop coming to rehearsals like that."

"Rehearsals?"

"I mean practice—basketball."

"Moral support, Old Sport. You didn't make those three baskets in a row like that till I waved to you."

McMillan seemed so pleased when he thought up the idea of having Brent wear basketball shorts and go barefoot that Brent hadn't the heart to tell him how *he* felt about it. Walking out onto the stage barefoot, in shorts, was a shock. But McMillan knew what he was doing.

McMillan had a reputation for doing everything, even "out in life," in a slightly theatrical manner, though most of the time you didn't even *know* it until you had *enjoyed* it. But *no* body could enjoy *this*. Still, Brent had to admit that the idea of starting from nothing, from scratch, made sense.

" 'No, no madam, for yourself you must be either one or the other!' "

" '*No! I am she whom you believe me to be.*' " Through an imaginary thick black veil, Brent looked at all the imaginary people.

" '*Laudisi:* And there, my friends, you have the truth! Are you satisfied?' " McMillan enacted Laudisi's derisive laugh. "It's getting better, Mr. Cameron. Once more."

Brent did a smart about-face and started upstage. The door frame made it seem more real. He was eager to do it with walls on each side.

Brent wouldn't be surprised if McMillan asked him to come out next wearing only his jock.

I was talking to some townie in this bar—says Stella screws anything that moves. Legend in her own times. They say she started in the crib with a rattlesnake." Naked, Brent's roommate rattled his locker door.

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Brent laughed so hard he cried, and his teammates laughed at him, and the laughter and gentle shoving eased him like watching rainbow trout in a mountain stream.

"How 'bout *you*, Brent? You like to take a turn?"

"Sure. Love to."

"Ever love it *before*?"

"Sure."

"Ah, come on, Brent. Admit it. You're a virgin, right?"

"Well. . ."

"Wasn't you the big football hero at Ironton?"

"Well. . ."

"Sure, he was. My old man used to take the Ironton *Courier*, and we kept track of him."

"Well, there was plenty of girls, you know, but I only really had *one*."

"*Had* her?"

"No, I mean *sweet*heart."

"How come she never comes up?"

"She's still in high school."

"Robbin' the cradle, Brent?"

"Well. . ."

"How 'bout Stella? You can *have* some, if you crave it."

"Sure, I'll go along."

"Hell. Even ol' McMillan knocks it off."

"Who says?"

"This townie I was talking to. She loves to brag. You know, big English professor."

"Talks like a queer in class." The imitation of a "queer" was perfect.

"He don't talk like a queer, man."

"You're not even in McMillan's class, man!"

"All that poetry!"

"Jesus! The man's a stud. Used to make it with his students at that university. Kicked him out for it."

"Look, don't jump on *me*."

"*Jump* on you? I'll stomp hell out of you. McMillan's cool."

"You ever see him at sports events?"

"I don't *look* for him. I'm playing *ball*, man."

"This guy said Stella told him McMillan begged her to be in this play he's getting up."

"Hey, wouldn't *that* be groovy!" He popped a locker door with his towel. "All us guys out there that's cut her. What an uprising!"

Voices from both sides of the row of lockers volleyed toward Brent.

"Why did she back out?" Brent's face was burning.

"See, this townie's a special friend of hers, don't even make it with her, and she told him she wanted to keep it a secret from *each* of us that she's going with *all* of us. And mainly, she's afraid if we all sit out there and see her, we'll start cheering and stomping, and mainly McMillan'll find out he ain't the only one. Says McMillan's got this purity complex about women, and he's convinced himself Stella's clean."

"What a mind that girl's got. And dropped out in the tenth!"

"Hey, guys, let's make Brent laugh till he cries. I love to watch him."

Brent walked toward the footlights, aware that the stage, midnight, the dark, the presence in the auditorium affected his own walk even before rehearsal began. "Sir?" he said to the dark.

"Good evening, Mr. Cameron." McMillan sounded very tired. "Tonight, I want you to come out nude."

"Sir. . ."

"Yes?" He sounded like a doctor telling Brent to cough. Brent gave up, feeling that to *talk* about it would only make it worse. Because he knew he would *do* it.

Undressing behind the curtain, dropping his clothes over a music stand, it occurred to him that if Stella had not refused the part, he wouldn't *be* here. He had avoided meeting her, going to bed with her, and the boys hadn't pushed it, as though they respected his virginity, realized it was reserved for the "right girl," and he was grateful.

"Mr. Cameron."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think you can find your way in the dark?"

"I think so."

"Then I'm going to turn out the work light, and I want you, at your *own* speed and in your own mood, while trying to retain the *feeling* of Signora Ponza, to make your entrance, do the movements I've blocked, and deliver your lines in total darkness. Do you know *why* I'm doing this?"

Without stopping to think, Brent said, "Yes, sir, I understand."

After rehearsal, Brent slipped into the dark gym and groped among the basketballs and went out onto the court and dribbled from one end to the other. He aimed at a gleam of light on the rim of a basket. The sound of the ball

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bouncing off the board sickened him. It rolled under the bleachers, and he had to crawl in the dark.

Gradually, he stripped off all his clothes, even his tennis shoes. And after a long while, drenched with sweat in the cold building where the heat had been turned off for the night, he began to make baskets.

The shoosh through the net lifted his pulse and he floated in the dark, imagining himself as Mercury, then feeling like Mercury, and for an instant, as he tossed the last ball, he *was* Mercury.

Late Thursday afternoon, Brent happened to pass through Herald Hall, shortcutting through the quadrangle, late for basketball practice, when he saw Kester sitting in McMillan's office, his books perched on his touching knees, McMillan sitting sideways rared back in his swivel chair, his feet propped up on his desk, an awkward posture of avoidance. Seeing Brent stride past, Kester flicked his hand up, and McMillan turned his head toward the door, but Brent missed his expression.

Brent ran through crisp leaves that lay thick under the close-standing maples, stirring up waves of sound that carried him to the gym door where sunlight glared on the panes.

Kester didn't come to watch practice. When Brent realized that he had made no baskets, he tried harder, then very hard.

Above the roar of the ten showers, somebody down by the door yelled: "What was the matter with you today, Brent?"

"Oh, I was just thinking of Stella."

They all laughed, jumping up and down, feet splashing, bodies glistening.

That night, Brent stripped before he even presented himself on stage. Not until he walked through the wide parlor entrance into the full glare of footlights—turned on for the first time, revealing ornate, heavy Victorian furniture and mock mirrors and Rococo clocks—did he imagine the surprise McMillan would feel at suddenly seeing him there, naked on stage.

"Sir?"

High heeled silver slippers set side by side, glittering in the footlights.

"Sir?"

He had come to feel McMillan's presence out there in the darkness as vividly as when their knees almost touched during conferences in his office. McMillan was not out there. The silence told Brent what was expected of him.

He bent over, picked up the shoes. Then he put them back, stood straight. He knelt, as a young lady would, to pick them up again, then went back through the door, closed it, and stepped into the slippers in the dark, wondering whether McMillan was only pretending not to be out there.

Wasn't Brent great tonight?" asked Kester, coming up to McMillan and three other students at the Deke victory party. Brent overheard, standing with another group by the window.

"I didn't see the game. I detest sports. Except for the solitary ones—running, pole vaulting, the man against himself, triumphing over himself."

"Well, sir, you don't know what you're missing. Brent finally broke through tonight. Everybody at home always felt he was holding back. Something's brought it out."

"Excuse me," McMillan said to the three students, "I must circulate, like a good chaperone."

"He's a bastard."

"Watch your mouth, Kester," said Brent, coming over to him, as the three students ambled away.

"What cause have *you* to stick up for him, Old Sport?"

"You always drink more than you can hold, Kester."

"Something bothering me, Old Sport."

Brent didn't want to know *what.*

"Don't you walk away from me. We used to play together when we were little."

"Nobody wants to hurt your feelings, Kester." Brent hoped that pacified him.

"Think nothing of it." Kester looked up at the ceiling. "I love it, obviously."

By the phonograph, shuffling through the records, aware that his roommate's girl was staring soulfully at him, Brent glanced over at Kester. He was still staring up at the ceiling. Brent looked up.

Brent swung his body among the desks from the back row toward the classroom door, watching the last student go out.

McMillan, gathering his usual load of books, looked up. "Want to see me?"

"Kester Dunlap. . ."

"Oh, God."

"We better watch out for him."

"We'd better what?"

"He's sneaky."

"Yes, I know he's sneaky."

"He was the one helped me write that—"

"That's past. And your work is improving, by the way."

"I'm failing Psych 7."

"I ought to kick your tail, Mr. Cameron."

"I'm sorry, sir, I try. But I've got basketball and— No, forget that, sir. I don't want to whine."

"Good. Now, what about Kester Dunlap *other*wise?"

"I don't know, sir. I was just saying we got to watch him."

Frowning, McMillan looked so straight into his eyes that Brent blinked.

Dress rehearsal tomorrow night, Mr. Cameron."

"With the others, sir?"

"No. They won't see you until you make your entrance opening night. I want to give *them* the same impact I give the audience, even at the risk of throwing them."

"Makeup tomorrow night?"

"Yes, and full costume. You're handling the costume very well."

"You going to help me put the makeup on? I don't know the first thing about it."

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"Try it yourself first. Then we'll see. Work at it until you make yourself look like what you know the boys will want to see in a beautiful face. Pirandello doesn't let her lift the veil, but just for that last line, *'No! I am she whom you believe me to be,'* I want them to see her face for a moment."

"Will I be able to see them when I lift the veil?"

"Can you see *me*?"

"No, sir."

Cameron."

"Yes, sir?"

Usually, McMillan gave commands like Major Scott in ROTC, but sometimes he spoke softly, as he did about poetry in class, and Brent had to strain to hear him out there in that theatrical darkness.

"How do you feel?"

"Fine."

"Awkward?"

"No, sir."

"Embarrassed?"

"No, sir."

"Exactly how *did* you feel a moment ago?"

"I can't say."

"Yes, you can."

"Like I was Stella."

"Who?"

"Signora Ponza!" Quickly, to cover, he asked, "Well, sir, how did it look to *you*?"

"Perfect."

MacFarland gave Brent a harder slap than usual. "Murder 'em, kid!"

The curtain was going up. After the game, he would just have time to dash to the theatre for the climax.

By half time, Brent had done nothing but stumble.

"Brent?"

"Yes, sir."

"What happened to the grace?"

"The what?"

"The grace you used to have? One thing you always had out there worth watching was grace. Only word for it. Decoration, maybe. Least you could decorate the play with grace, even when you didn't make it on the baskets. Now, I can't even *look* at you."

When Brent went back out onto the gleaming court, he tried to move with grace. Bumped off balance once, he landed square—his feet cocked up, he slid four feet and slammed into the wall by the water fountain.

MacFarland didn't put his head in his hands this time. He just stared at Brent, mouth open.

At the end of the game, Brent saw Kester leave with the crowd, and his heart was light, knowing that Kester wouldn't be in the audience when he walked out onto the stage fifteen minutes from now.

The shock of cold water was greater than Brent had ever felt. He worked the water up to as hot as he could stand it, enveloping himself in steam, standing in the middle of the shower room, his eyes closed. He wished the end nozzle in the corner were not in use. The shouts of victorious players in the other dressing room penetrated the cinder block walls. Brent's teammates were silent, each feeling responsible, but he sensed that they blamed him most. Though he was seldom great, he had never been bad. Never, as MacFarland put it, graceless.

With one of the keys McMillan had secured for him, Brent entered the theatre through the boiler room door. In a corner, under the air ducts, sat a dressing table, lit up, and from a steam pipe hung the black dress, the hat, the veil. The slippers—black ones, not the silver rehearsal shoes—were on the table beside the makeup.

The secrecy of the set-up aggravated his nervousness. But he was not too nervous to observe—as he rose and stepped backward toward the hum of the furnace to look at himself—that the face in the mirror was, indeed, as McMillan had said, "perfect." Perhaps the word was "beautiful."

He let fall the veil and inserted the brass key. *"The door to the regular dressing room also will be locked. Only* you *can open it."* He opened the door, stepped into the deserted dressing room, and crossed it, shivering. But as he climbed the stairs, he realized that what he was feeling was not nervousness—it was thrill.

People were working backstage. *"Don't let them throw you. It will at first, maybe, because you aren't used to seeing them there, but you must stay absolutely in character."* They turned in the faint light to stare, trying to play it cool. But Brent knew that the suspense and mystery made them aware of the beating of their own hearts as he was aware of his own. Will she reveal herself at the curtain call? they are wondering.

"When you exit, go straight back the way you came—don't run—stay in character, even in front of the backstage crew, as you leave. Lock the doors behind you." Brent stood behind the masking, waiting for his cue, trying to shut out MacFarland's voice and eyes: *"What happened to the grace?"*

A voice behind him said, "I'm your husband, Miss."

Brent turned, even more startled to see the face—heavily lined with mascara and rouge, the mouth defined by a false mustache—of the boy who sat next to him in psych class, who passed every test with an A-plus. The boy himself was taking a deep breath, looking at a strange girl—overwhelmed.

" *'You must not irritate him. You must leave him alone. Oh, please!'* " Not McMillan's voice cueing him this time, but the strange voice of a woman.

"Well, you're *on*." When the boy touched his arm, Brent felt and saw a spark.

He stepped out into the entrance of the parlor in Italy.

Who is it?"

"Kester."

"Go away. I'm asleep."

"You better stop acting so hateful."

"Who *is* that out there?" Brent's roommate looked out from under his pillow.

"Kester Dunlap."

"Hey, boy, you better get away from that door, 'fore I come out there and chew your arm right off your shoulder."

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Afraid somebody would recognize him, Brent did not show up at the dining room Saturday morning. For the first time, he missed breakfast with the team. But he couldn't sleep. He lay on his cot and tried to feel real.

The door shot open, straight-armed, and Brent's roommate and three other jocks came in.

"Looks like I'm going to be a playgoer!"

"Hell, me, too!"

"Why didn't somebody *tell* us?"

"Hell, we was bouncing balls all over the place, man, while *she*—"

"Jesus, I never saw guys so excited."

"I was so certain she'd turn out to be Stella after all, I didn't feel too bad about not being there opening night—figured I might go to one of the other performances."

"Hey, Brent, you awake or asleep?"

Brent kept still, made no sound.

At lunch, Brent listened to the talk himself.

He ate a light supper at the Dutchman's, the only other eating place in Melbourne.

He walked in the woods until time to perform.

Sunday morning, he went to breakfast. By now, everyone had seen the mysterious lady."

"Hell, I'm going again tonight."

"Most beautiful woman I ever laid eyes on."

"*Girl* is more like it."

"I'd give my left—"

"Ah, watch it, man, she's a damn nice girl."

"How *you* know?"

"Can't you tell by looking at her?"

"Hell, they all the same. They all *like* it."

" 'All,' huh? How *you* know?"

"Ones I ain't had, I ain't met."

"Bull."

"Well, *he'll* bull you, boys, but if you want to know what it's like, *I* can tell you. 'Cause last night after the show, she was hotter'n hell, full of the feeling the guys gave her, sitting out there burning like wicks, so I *got* me some."

"What was it like?"

"Hell, I'm sorry, she swore me to secrecy."

They all laughed until they nearly cried. Brent's laughter, sounding as false as a cracked bell, made them look at him.

In the dressing room, he tried to keep away from the others, but they ambled up to him quite naturally, as though his body, like their own, were a low-powered magnet. Unbuttoning his shirt, he felt the starch brush against his nipples.

"Love to seen her in a tighter dress, wouldn't you?"

"Yeah, it hung too loose."

"I ain't swimming in the same pool with *you* guys. I like my water *cold*."

"Just like to brush with my two thumbs the places where her mourning dress seemed to rise from the dead."

"Man, I'm suffering. Suffering."

"Know how you feel. Sticky dreams."

"McMillan cold-cocked Bronson with the poetry book 'cause he was putting a fourth act on that play, sitting there glassy-eyed. 'It's *your* fault, sir.' he said, and McMillan blushed and said he was sorry, but we was all laughing, Ol' Bronson, too."

Brent stood with one trouser leg off, balanced on one foot, and slowly pulled the other off, feeling every inch of cloth against his skin.

"Thing about *her* is guys talk dirty 'bout wanting to lay her, you know, but you can tell by their voices they don't think it's right, yet they plow right on. You know?"

"Yeah."

"I'll be honest. I'd just like to *kiss* her one time."

Brent followed them toward the showers.

"Yeah, well, I know what you mean, but when you come right down to it, I'd love to stroke her from ear*lobe* to tip*toe*." The envisioned ecstasy made him let out a raucous scream that roared in the tiled shower room, and as he turned the shower full gush, he looked at Brent through the steam. "Wouldn't *you*, Brent?"

Awkwardly standing on the raised sill of the shower room, Brent turned, slipped, staggered, and almost ran back to the locker, reaching for his clothes.

Brent lay on his cot through the supper hour. But avoiding the team only made the things they had said over the past three days come back more lucidly. He saw their faces, and the strange new ways they used their hands.

His flesh burned. When he felt his jock begin to fill and stretch, he jumped up and walked quickly out of the room and down the stairs.

Yes?"

"You Stella?"

"Yeah."

"I wonder if you'd let me come in."

"What you so nervous about?" She had lowered her voice.

"Stage fright."

"Haven't I seen you some place before?"

"That's a good line," said Brent. "Can I come in?"

"I don't even *know* you." The room behind her was brightly lighted, full of cigar smoke.

"The guys said you were pretty friendly."

"Look, I don't just go out with anybody, anytime."

"Who is it, Stella, some salesman?" McMillan's voice, so casual, natural, startled Brent.

"Yeah, honey, I'm trying to get him to take no for an answer."

An indulgent chuckle—McMillan amused at an inept pun.

"We don't want none—*any*."

Brent turned away, nauseous.

"Hey!" she whispered.

"What?"

"*Now*, I remember. When you lifted that veil. . ." At the look in her eyes, Brent shivered. "They sent you to make fun of me, huh? Like the other one—the little one."

"Little one *who*?"

"Called him Keeser or Custer."

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That *you*, Old Sport?"

Up the main street of the toy town of Melbourne, Kester walked toward Brent along an iron fence.

"Keep walking, Kester—the other way."

"You better stop being so hateful to me."

"You needn't worry anymore."

"I've taken enough off you and him."

"You always *did* talk in tongues, Kester, like people in revival tents."

"I won't *tell*, Brent."

"What is there for you not to tell?"

Kester stood on the corner under the streetlight and looked at him. Brent stood in the dark on the sidewalk, afraid to get near Kester. "I saw you that first night, and I went back last night, and I'm going again tonight. A lot of guys are going their third time. But I knew it was you the *first* night."

"You were at the basketball game the first night."

"I ran over for the ending."

"It's going to end without me tonight."

"Don't let the talk get you down."

"I'm hitting the road."

"You can't do McMillan that way. It's almost curtain time."

"So long, Kester."

"I promise I won't tell."

"Shut up, Kester."

"That's just how McMillan talked. I told him I wouldn't tell about you and him, and first he got mad, and then he laughed like I was an armless freak threatening to slap him, and it was like getting slapped myself, the way he laughed. He's the devil, Brent."

"Shut up, Kester."

"So when he was laughing at me, I decided there wasn't anything going on between you."

"Goddamn you, shut up!"

"Brent, it'll pass over. *I've* heard them talking, too. I walk around and *listen* to them. But they don't know, and I won't tell, and before long, after a few more games, you know, you'll forget it. *You can*, because there's nothing wrong with you, Brent." Brent glanced back. Kester was backing away, out of the streetlight. "Believe me, Brent." Kester backed into the dark under the thick new leaves of trees hanging over the street. "I promise not to come tonight. There's not a *thing* wrong with you!" Then Kester turned and walked through the main gates of the campus.

The leaves loud under his feet, Brent walked into the pool of light, a feeling of grace in his stride. □

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BOOKS

John Lindberg / Stephen Dobyns / Gordon Harrington

The American Shakers/From Neo-Christianity to Presocialism, by Henri Desroche. University of Massachusetts. $9.50

Things have come full circle. One hundred and thirty years ago the land was thick with communes. Earnest bearded men and long-haired women wore natural colors of homespun and did enough farming to satisfy their conscientiously modest needs. They had unusual theories about the family and they turned away from society. Their only lasting contributions are their names. Oneida, Ephrata, Harmony, Amana—they stir a vague nostalgia for a lost simplicity and some dim notions about handicrafts and phalansteries.

Now again we have communes rife with strange practices. Companionate marriage, goods in common, every man his own priest—these old new ideas might go the way of their forebears. Who now remembers the Rappites, the Separatists of Zoar, and the Millennial Church? Edmund Wilson has told us about the old groups in their dozens in *To the Finland Station.* Now a former Dominican Frenchman has taken the Millennial Church, or the Shakers, for the topic of a book on how the religious commune relates to the economic and political life of the larger society. Our latter-day communitarians will here find an explanation of the problems besetting a separatist reform movement. They might learn some of the origins of their innovations, and might avoid a few of the old mistakes.

Desroche has not written a history of sects. Withdrawing from the Dominicans in quest of a full commitment between faith and practice, he has traced the tangency between religious and socialist communes, choosing the Shakers as an exemplary study perhaps because Engels found them a useful illustration of communism.

The Shakers developed during the religious revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries. They took a more extreme view of reform than did the only religious development, Methodism, that has lasted from that time to this. In common with millenarian movements of the past, the Shakers divided the world sharply between good and evil. The Wesleys, on the contrary, did not see an evil spirit at work except as mankind failed in its duty. Methodism tried through education to give a moral basis to the free economy by means of self-government. But the Shakers attributed evil to the flesh. In their view, lust led to children, and society sanctioned lust with the institution of marriage so that there might be plenty of workers. The owners of wealth could use marriage to enslave their victims because marriage leads the partners to desire private property, which can only be secured through cooperating with the exploitative system.

The Shaker prophetess, Ann Lee, a Manchester factory girl, saw society gone violent through the twin evils of overproduction and reproduction. She transformed her tiny millenarian sect by the public avowal of sexual abstinence. They repudiated the conventional family to form a Shaker Family based not on sexuality but on Christian equality. Partly because of this egalitarianism, partly because of the difficulties of setting up a frontier settlement (Niskeyuna, near Albany, in 1776), the Shaker Family became communists.

Cutting themselves off from the economic development of the new American nation, the Shaker family was forced to deify Ann Lee in order to have sufficient reason to live withdrawn. Upon her death, Ann Lee was proclaimed the second Messiah. The long-range effect of this proclamation was to give the Shakers the unusual status of a group living in the beginning of the actual millennium prophesied in Revelations. This postmillenarianism gave them the appeal of offering a Messiah and not just a prophet (premillenarianism). But the immediate effect of the deification of Ann Lee was to elevate women into full participation in the institutional life of the Shaker Family.

"It is as if a woman was expected to renounce some aspect of her femininity in order to affirm some aspect of religious life. Yet the admission of women to religious functions opens the way for recognition of feminine values and even feminism." Shaker evangelism was so successful (6000 members in the mid-19th century) because it relied on the guilt of sexuality and the shock of sexual confession. Biblical strictures on sex made it seem the natural form of Original Sin, which was to blame for the misery of the workers in the Industrial Revolution. "The guilt they abhorred was somehow determined by the society in which they lived." So the practice of sexual abstinence led to the ideal of a society based on the millennial religious family.

It is hard for us to realize the appeal of the Shaker commune. Salvation was immediate and sure; just stop sex. Of course abstinence on a group scale required a social order. "Outside the Family there can be no community. . . .to end wars, do away with private property; to do away with private property, end marriage." Becoming aware of their role as industrial serfs, the Shakers formed the Millennial Church, using the guilty sexual conscience to reject society. They were unconcerned with the physical consequences of abstinence: i.e., no children. Believing themselves to inhabit a heaven on earth in their com-

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munes, an actual millennium since the Second Coming in the form of Ann Lee, the Shakers lived in their Family as an incorruptible body. God would provide for the welfare of the Church. No one was expected to know how, except that in heaven is no marrying nor giving in marriage. In practicing sexual purity by denying the flesh, the Shakers displayed a gnostic rationalism of great attraction to theoretical socialists.

Mid-19th century America was host to a host of millennial socialists. The nonreligious communes (Owenites and Fourierists) could not compete with the combined impetus of religious fervor and self-reliant separatism of many religious groups. Yet in the gradual attrition of historic process, as the American economy became more industrial and capitalist, the religious communes withered away. The Shakers were among the most successful and the most typical. They began with the birth of the Republic. They hoped Niskeyuna would bring about an immediate transformation of the new country. The patriotism remained, but the fervor moderated. By mid-19th century, the Shakers were content to view themselves in the vanguard of American progress, with varying degrees of holiness in the general society. Society was not evil in itself as long as it tended to improve. The Idea of Progress had invaded primitive doctrine.

At its peak, the Millennial Church arranged three degrees of membership according to how much was contributed to the Church. The ritual of de-marriage of new members added largely to the real property of the Church. Yet there was no profit-sharing nor democratic self-government. All was in the management of Elders and Deacons, in pairs of man and woman, who maintained a rigid hierarchy. All production was returned to the commune for consumption, so that the economy of the group was a practical Eucharist, and seen as that. In the absence of pay-scales (for even the Elders worked without pay), there was no individual incentive, but a work-ethic kept the commune at a prosperous level in rhythm with the stimulus of good or bad times in the larger American economy.

The Shaker commune interests us because it combined sexual equality with social rejection. In one form or another, these themes permeate the communes of today. But the fate of the Shakers is a grim lesson to the hopes of the counter-culture. The Shakers could not make a successful fit. With their insistence on the presence of the millennium and thus the absence of property, they were at once too material for the churches and too spiritual for the socialists. They wanted a priestless church in a classless society. Such a sentence cannot be expressed in the grammars either of Protestantism or Communism.

"They were on strike against society as it was, and had millenarian hopes that by extending their strike over the entire face of the earth they would finally destroy that society." But with their abhorrence of large industry, and with their insistence on self-determination, they could make no collective effort to resist the inroads of modern capitalism on their economic integrity. They might have survived as a monastic community under the protection of an established church. But in abolishing the priest-class they denied themselves the tolerance that the business world extends to its sacerdotal keepers of conscience. They might have made common cause with some of the dozens of communitarian ventures in the America of their time. But their insistence that they were the true inheritors of the already realized Second Coming allowed them only a general sympathy with other groups. They were especially sympathetic towards the Mormons and towards the Oneida community. The ones practiced the patriarchal concubinage of the Bible, the others practiced coitus interruptus and eugenics in a form of companionate marriage. The Shakers admired both practices as a rejection of conventional marriage. But finally the Shakers fell victim to their own sacred knowledge. They were too good for the rest of us.

—*John Lindberg*

Penetrable and Impenetrable

Darker, by Mark Strand. Atheneum. $2.95
The Garbage Wars, by Donald Finkel. Atheneum. $3.95

Mark Strand is one of the few poets in this country whose work improves steadily book by book. The poems in his third book take on a strength and power which is rarely seen in American poetry. Fortunately, he has gotten rid of the extreme ambiguity and excessive dream-like quality of his earlier work; and while there is still a surreal texture to the poems, they declare themselves directly with simple sentences and a subdued tone. Everything is relaxed here, despite the feeling of desperation. Short common words and repetition are used to construct the poems bit by bit, line breaks are easy, and in the finished poem no seam shows. Strand builds poems, rather than writes them. Each word is perfectly placed and balanced. Often in reading someone's work it's too easy to see how the poem was put together: the joints still show, the glue barely holds. Most of Strand's poems are all of one piece and it is difficult to think of them in any other form. They appear spontaneous in the way Yeats meant. They rest on nothing but themselves. One such poem is "Coming to This."

> We have done what we wanted.
> We have discarded dreams, preferring the heavy industry
> of each other, and we have welcomed grief
> and called ruin the impossible habit to break.
>
> And now we are here.
> The dinner is ready and we cannot eat.
> The meat sits in the white lake of its dish.
> The wine waits.
>
> Coming to this
> has its rewards: nothing is promised, nothing is taken away.
> We have no heart or saving grace,
> no place to go, no reason to remain.

The book has only a few weak poems, and the poems that fail do so

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because their endings appear manufactured and tacked on. It's as if these poems were going in a particular direction, then were brought up short and forced into some other, unnatural direction. "Tomorrow" is an example of this, although here the manufactured ending seems to comment on the very thing it exemplifies.

> Your best friend is gone,
> your other friend, too.
> Now the dream that used to turn in
> your sleep,
> like a diamond, sails into the year's
> coldest night.
>
> What did you say?
> Or was it something you did?
> It makes no difference—the house of
> breath collapsing
> around your voice, your voice burning,
> are nothing to worry about.
>
> Tomorrow your friends will come back;
> your moist open mouth will bloom in
> the glass of storefronts.
> Yes. Yes. Tomorrow they will come
> back and you
> will invent an ending that comes out
> right.

One of the faults of Strand's second book, *Reasons for Moving*, was that it seemed to lean too heavily on a number of South American poets: Borges and others. That's not true of *Darker*. Although his affinities are still to these poets, Strand seems no longer like them or to be borrowing from them. Instead, they now share certain family characteristics while each definitely remains his own beast.

An insistent sadness fills the best of these poems, while in the weaker poems that same feeling irritatingly comes across as boredom. What emerges is the tired voice of a person borne down by the weight of an empty world; a person who sees action as futile; a person living without joy or hope. Having no power over his life, the person seems to find something slightly redeeming in an interior life which is propped up by the writing of poems, although he can't count on his poems to save him.

To my mind, however, there is a major fault to this book. Namely, an over-abundance of gloom. The tone is similar in all the poems. Everything is hollow, hollow, hollow. There's nothing to break it up. The poems are excellent in themselves, but in such quantity they lose their effect, lose their excellence. Instead of a gatekeeper to come on stage after Macbeth kills Duncan and his good wife smears the blood around, another Duncan is killed, then another and another, while the blood becomes as effective as cherry syrup.

Even the positive poems, those asserting the narrator's existence (will to survive?), are hardly cheerful and often even gloomier as in "The Guardian."

> The sun setting. The lawns on fire.
> The lost day, the lost light.
> Why do I love what fades?
>
> You who left, who were leaving,
> what dark rooms do you inhabit?
> Guardian of my death,
>
> preserve my absence. I am alive.

But just barely it would seem. The book's epigraph, taken from "Seven Poems," is equally positive.

> I have a key
> so I open the door and walk in.
> It is dark and I walk in.
> It is darker and I walk in.

Apparently the only reason for walking in is that one has the key. But what is continually given in the book seem to be reasons for not walking at all: "Everything dims./ The future is not what it used to be./ The graves are ready. The dead/ shall inherit the dead." "I grow into my death./ My life is small/ and getting smaller. The world is green./ Nothing is all." "And who doesn't have one foot in the grave?" "You slave away into old age/ and nothing you do adds up to much./ Day after day you go through the same motions,/ you shiver in bed, you get hungry, you want a woman."

Finally, it becomes too much. What was extremely moving in five poems becomes comic—not funny, mind you, but comic.

What might be a fault here is that there is no reason given for this gloom, just as there appears to be no reason for continuing. Perhaps gloom is concomitant to life itself, but that is not enough of a reason. For instance, Sylvia Plath's world seemed gloomier, but while I might wish for comic relief while reading *Ariel* none of the poems lessen in power because of a sameness in tone. The trouble is that the poems in *Darker* are really good and I don't in the least doubt Strand's sincerity, but poems which struck me as excellent when I just picked up the book casually became merely more of the same when I began to prepare this piece. The book should have been broken up in some way, or, if there must be an over-abundance of gloom, perhaps some small cause should be given.

* * *

In any good poem, there must be some possible connection between it and the reader, something to catch onto, some sort of bridge. This is not an ideal but a prerequisite. Naturally there's some leeway and after a given point poems appeal to people differently. But the potential must be there. If there is no possibility of the poem connecting, then it is dismissed as too private. It might be a brilliant construction, but if there is no possible point of penetration, then nothing is gained—except perhaps by the poet.

Many of Donald Finkel's poems have such doors, especially those in *A Joyful Noise* (Atheneum, 1966) which is an excellent book. Therefore, I found it particularly frustrating to find almost no unlockable doors in his latest book, *The Garbage Wars*. There was evidence of something going on, but it seemed that no amount of reading would let me into it. There was no feeling of witnessing anything. Instead, it was like hearing about something important second- or third-hand. There are exceptions, certainly, but even the exceptions gave me trouble. The best and most ambitious is "Water Music," a complicated 15-page poem which is about porpoises the way "Sailing to Byzantium" is about Byzantium. The poem is a kind of collage and in the beginning of the book Finkel acknowledges his indebtedness for it to Robert Graves, John Lilly, Henri Michaux, the Book of Jonah, *Life*, Hans Christian Andersen, Aristotle, Oppian, James Rowe, Wesley Griswold, John Cage, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, Sir Arthur Grimble, Eleanore Devine, Martha Clark, Ovid, John Burnet, Frantz Fanon, Erik Satie, Archilochus, and Stephen Crane. Quotes from this

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rather mixed bag are placed throughout the poem, which I hope is the reason for their being acknowledged. The beginning of the poem will give another idea of its complexity.

> *"What crime have I committed?" asked Arion. "You are too rich," replied the captain.*
>
> At song's length I held them sullen
> as wolves
> lashed by music my arms my
> scorpion
> my scourge rooted an hour they
> stood
> a spinney of thorn-trees
>
> tar-handed babies
> itching under their beards resentment
> flickered
> behind their lantern flames
>
> though
> what I had done escaped me twice
> over
> boarding and leaving I paid for that
> passage
>
> (for them no passage home was a
> drunken island weaving from harbor to
> harbor panthers prowling the cordage
> I the true trespasser)

After a great deal of reading, I am still not positive that the game is worth the candle, here, but I suspect it is.

Quite a few of the poems in the book include quotes from various authors whom Finkel acknowledges. Ideally the quotes tie the poems firmly to a tradition of human achievement and behavior, although I am not sure of the success of this. The book also deals with the contemporary world more than is usual with Finkel, a contemporary world resting against this backdrop of often historical quotes.

But the history is not objective, although it appears so at times. Because of this some of the poems assume a irritating preachy quality or, as in the last stanza of "Black Study" which is prefaced by a quote from Stokeley Carmichael, an avowal of white guilt:

> May it fare well with you sniper crouching on the roof
> snarling down the bull-horn's throat for every breath
> I take unscathed a black child gives his finger to a rat
> a black hand signs his name on a black cheek-bone
> may I be sleeping safely in my bed the night
> aflame with impersonal rage you speak.

A number of the poems, as in all of Finkel's books, deal with the aesthetics of poetry and the act of writing. The potential success of such poems would seem to be mixed since the poet is dealing with an extremely personal and individual business and since the reader is likely to have his own asthetic theories. To some degree they clarify the other poems, but more often it is like being told about the workings of some complicated machine. If someone explains to me the workings of the Wankel engine, I may be interested but it's unlikely that I'll be moved.

Often the major preoccupation of the poems is the passage of time, the process of decay which surrounds one. There is almost a feeling of amaze that time is indeed passing. The narrator worries about finding the right direction in a world where there might not be one; of learning the alternatives and choosing the correct one in a world where living is extremely difficult and we all may be losers.

> Rode right past spring again on my
> weary-go-round
> for the thirty-ninth time without
> catching the ring
> the sky is riddled with the crack of
> angry bats
> the pinwheels rattle irritably in the
> wind
> I sweep down summer's throat to my
> wheezing music
> wrapped in her sultry breath on a
> painted swan
> as the sun reels out of the east and
> vanishes
> over the maples' gilded canopy.
>
> *("Going Down")*

I think many of the poems in *The Garbage Wars* go wrong because Finkel gets in their way. He inserts himself between the poem and the reader. The worst thing that a poet can do to a poem is to attempt to make it speak for himself, to attempt to create an extension of himself. The poem has to be allowed to be. It can't be forced. Too many of the poems here seem constructed, forced into shape from a so-called good idea, especially the ones in the sections "The Possessed" and "The Garbage Wars".

The world is nasty because we made it that way. The curse of God is upon us. We bear the mark of Cain. Perhaps true, but too many of Finkel's poems seem to exist just in order to say that.

—Stephen Dobyns

Responses to the Skinner Stimulus

A recent survey within the psychological profession found B. F. Skinner the world's "most admired" psychologist. Whether based on popular referendum or through analyses of his impact upon the field, it is clear that Skinner occupies the preëminent position among psychologists. The interpretation to a lay audience of the broad societal implication of the scientific contributions which have established such eminence cannot be lightly dismissed. *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* is that interpretation.

There is a professional tabu among psychologists against hasty or broad generalization of research results. Privately a psychologist may believe that he can generalize to humans the observation that rats cannot walk on water. Professionally and publicly he is expected to indicate that knowledge is not sufficiently advanced, that we must test in the laboratory whether or not psychologists, philosophers, and book critics can walk on water. Further, one protects against ill-advised generalization by being cautious in interpreting results to nonprofessional audiences. A psychologist who publishes psychological material in a nonprofessional journal will encounter great difficulty finding employment in academe. The most severe criticism of Harvard's Psychology Department Chairman Robert Herrnstein was not of his views on heredity and IQ, but that he published them in *The Atlantic*. The critical result of the tabu is an abysmal lack of nontechnical writing representing the main stream of psychology. Under these circumstances the advent of Skinner's book is a rare event.

Psychological theories occupy a unique place in the universe of ideas. The physiologist's theory of heart

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action is applied by the physician in his diagnostic and care procedures. The astronomer's theory of moon motion can be used by NASA engineers in landing an Apollo flight. Scientific theories are generally applied by professionals. Theories of child psychology are applied by parents. These theories may be explicit or only vaguely recognized, but some view of human nature governs parental action. If theories change, practice changes with a potentially profound impact on society. Change the upbringing of a generation and you change the society. Freud's views of man largely displaced the theologically inspired nineteenth century view of man as sinner. Guilt, originally a prerequisite to penitence, grace, and salvation, became a neurotic symptom. Half a century ago psychiatric practice rested largely on the over-inhibited neurotic. Today the over-inhibited is a rarity. Psychological concepts have profound impact. They may be erroneous or veridical, consistent or confused, but once accepted they guide the future.

Skinner's work is, then, important because of his stature in the field and because it is one of the very few general writings from any major psychologist. Since the social significance of behavioral theories depends on their acceptance, the response of readers is of unusual interest. Hence, this review of reviewers.

As a psychologist I am committed to faith in a scientific analysis of behavior. Since the essence of science is prediction, the first article of this faith is belief that behavior is predictable. Accepting this canon I assumed that I could predict what Skinner would write, and, therefore, I need not read his book first in order to comment on its reviews. In fact, it seemed a rather charming idea to defer the book completely until this manuscript had been drafted, thus providing a real test of my prediction. The quotations by several reviewers were sufficiently alien to my expectations to send me to the book. Reading restored my faith in the predictability of behavior of both Skinner and that genre—book critics. Both said what I expected in content and both disappointed me in how they did so.

My disappointment in Skinner will become clear later. It is not literary. (The majority of reviewers of the "literary" Skinner seem near to Gazzaniga's characterization in the *National Review* of November 5, 1971—"a superb writer, a brilliant polemicist." A minority dissent can be found in *Book World* with the prediction that Skinner's "deadly style" assures "this book will doubtless be . . . not widely read.") My disappointment in reviewers stems from criticisms which seem to misrepresent the man's views. I find it equally difficult to believe that the misrepresentations are either deliberate or are the product of sloppy reading. For example, Chomsky in the *New York Review of Books* for December 30, 1971 says in quoting Skinner, "He believes that 'the control of the population as a whole must be delegated to specialists—to police, priests, owners, teachers, therapists...' " The impression is left that Skinner advocates police control. In the original context this delegation of

control is considered a characteristic of the existing social structure, a characteristic which is an impediment to the introduction of utopian schemes.

Having suggested previously that the significance of the work is its orientation toward a lay audience, I have drawn the reviews from general readership sources. In this connection it is perhaps worth noting that I could find no reviews in *Science* or *Nature*—which would be the key journals for a major scientific treatise. In an interview for *The Center Magazine* of March/April, 1972, Skinner reports that about eighty percent of a hundred or more reviews have been unfavorable.

Considering Skinner's stature among psychologists, it is not surprising to find the most laudatory reviews are those of his peers. John Platt in *The Center Magazine* begins by observing, "Skinner may have the worst press of any great scientist since Darwin." There follows an elaboration and explanation of Skinner's position. *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* concluded,

> "It is hard to imagine a world in which people live together without quarreling, maintain themselves by producing the food, shelter, and clothing they need, enjoy themselves and contribute to the enjoyment of others in art, music, literature, and games, consume only a reasonable part of the resources of the world... and come to know themselves accurately and, therefore, manage themselves effectively. Yet all of this is possible . . ."

Platt comments: "It is not a dream. He has helped to make it a reality that is already coming into existence at many centers. They are seeds of the first culture that has ever offered tested and effective ways of shaping each other's behavior so as to reach our full and diverse human potentialities. For the solutions of our deep problems, in the long run it is the only hope we have."

In what many will probably rank as the most important review, Noam Chomsky concludes that those with libertarian or humanist concerns "will no doubt dismiss the travesty that Skinner presents." His criticism centers on Skinner's claims to being "scientific." "At the moment we have virtually no scientific evidence and not even the germs of an interesting hypothesis about how human behavior is determined . . . In any event, the claims that Skinner puts forth in this category are either dogmatic or uninteresting . . . ," says Chomsky. "In general, Skinner's conception of science is very odd. . . . His a priori methodological assumptions rule out all but the most trivial scientific theories . . ."

Gazzaniga, whose review is a model of succinct precision, points directly at the fact that the definition of a "reinforcer" is tautological, hence non-

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predictive, hence nonscience. Max Black in *The Center Magazine* suspects "unwarranted generalization" in attaching the term "reinforcer" to such diverse things as "noises and gestures . . . money, friendship, the joy of achievement, love . . ."

Do we have a scientific genius or a scientific incompetent? Yes.

Throughout most of his career Skinner averred that he had no psychological theory. Theory lay in the distant future, following adequate, careful empirical work. To Skinner science is procedures, methodology—hence, control. To Chomsky it is prediction, theory—hence, explanation. The key to the issue is that technology and science are essentially synonymous for Skinner. He is not really a scientist, he is a technician. You do not need to be able to explain the failure of a light bulb in order to diagnose that it is burned out and to select the remedial procedure of replacement. Grammatical errors of a student may be corrected without an explanation of the origin of the errors.

For the psychologist a rather frustrating aspect of psychology has been that knowledge which has proved most explanatory of behavior has had little value in application, while the most useful applied knowledge has contributed little to understanding. Thus the critics who question Skinner's claim to substantial knowledge of the science of behavior are expecting *explanatory* or *theoretical* knowledge. What is offered is *applied* or *technical* knowledge.

Nonscientists among reviewers, as well as scientists, are disturbed by the dismissal of inner man. Thompson in the *NAR* [spring 1972], Caws in the October 16, 1971, *New Republic*, as well as Chomsky, question whether one can properly conceive of man solely as a passive recipient of external influences. Psychologists sometimes refer to this as the "empty organism" view of behavior. Skinner, of course, responds that he doesn't really think the organism is "empty," only that scientific analysis has no place for internal events. The lay reader will not understand an occasional snide remark from Skinner, who seems uncertain whether the chief protagonists of a psyche are the humanists outside of his discipline or the physiological psychologists within. After all, the former only hold their views because of reinforcement contingencies while the latter believe they can produce laboratory evidence of internal events affecting behavior. Since physiological psychology has played a dominant role in psychology in the last decade, one may wonder again at Skinner's intra-discipline eminence. If the dominant research lines are toward a view of man as active not passive, full not empty, why has there been such impact from what, to the intelligent outsider, seems rather feeble?

Koestler and Krutch are popular references for those who would criticize Skinner. Skinnerian faculty, whom I know, require their students to read Koestler and Krutch while they are doing their beginning laboratory work. A common assignment in the first course is to condition then extinguish a response in a faculty member without his awareness during a single class period. The response and the faculty member are left to the student. In my experience the two most popular choices are to condition some odd verbal phrasing in a humanist faculty member during a lecture damning "behaviorism" and to condition some unusual physical mannerism in the instructor making the assignment. Operant conditioning works, and the psychology student who has seen it work is little moved by explanations of lack of theoretical rigor in its formulation. He becomes the graduate student and ultimately the professional.

For someone who twenty years ago worked in an institution for severely disturbed children to compare the behavior of similar children under operant therapies today, it is difficult to push aside the suspicion that the Messiah has returned and is working miracles. Are we to believe a Chomsky that miracles must be rejected unless they can be explained? Are we to believe a Thompson that despite our senses miracles really can't take place because men have souls and the miracle worker doesn't believe in souls? It is true that as a meticulous scientist I cannot precisely define a stimulus, a response, or a reinforcer for an adequate theory of operant conditioning. But, I can condition a human. As a scene from Dickens reminds us, it is possible to ride and groom a horse without being able to define one.

It is this sense of the miraculous possible which establishes Skinner's importance in his field. The critical aspect of *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* is its possibility. It could happen here.

My disappointment in Skinner is that he asked his readers either to take on faith the evidence of effectiveness of control by reinforcement or to gain faith by other reading. It is not certain that he himself is best qualified to marshal that evidence. His views seem not to have changed one whit over a quarter of a century, not even including the significant extensions to his own work. His discussions assume a view of aggression which has been largely displaced by evidence that aggression is operantly conditioned. Similarly he is uninfluenced by the substantial literature on imitation which has added a major new dimension to the power of operant conditioning. Since this literature bears heavily on media influences, particularly TV, it adds substantially to the possibility of cultural control.

Though it is implicit throughout the book, I do not believe Skinner makes the fundamental issue of control clear. Control, in his sense, is a fact. We will be controlled by reinforcement contingencies. We have the option of leaving the control to chance or exercising it deliberately. With knowledge, some control will be exercised deliberately. The essential question is: by whom and to what end?

For the October 9, 1971, *New Yorker*, Skinner's end is the Victorian era. Few reviewers, including this one, seem inclined to put the selection of values in his hands. It has never been clear to me how the philosopher could gain that king's job, and the route to Culture Designer for the psychologist seems equally difficult.

But if not the philosopher or psychologist, who? Big Brother? This is not a warning to guard ourselves against control. It can be read as a warning that control is now and always will be exercised. As knowledge advances it may, however, become more

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deliberately and precisely manipulated. Whether it is complete control (determinism) or partial control (an orderly universe with free will) is hardly relevant. The alternatives are not control or no control; *1984* is here, and we fail to recognize it only because it is chaotic. Many elements of it threaten life on this planet. To survive we need to bring some order out of the chaos. Skinner's dream is that we all play a part in specifying that order.

I share with most reviewers a skepticism about this future. The need for cultural order is questionable. Survival of the species has depended upon the existence of variability. It is diversity that promises the existence of a new solution to a survival problem when an old one fails. To bring order out of chaos could be a death sentence for man.

The possibility is there, however. One can comfortably criticize Skinner only if one does not really believe it is possible. The evidence is now rather clear that the effects of counselling and psychotherapy labeled "client centered" (because the individual presumably worked out his own solutions) were, in fact, a result of unconscious operant conditioning by the counsellor. It is frightening both to psychologist and client to discover that critical life value decisions made by an individual were really those of his therapist. I can smile and applaud at a PTA meeting, when the principal talks of teaching sound values to my children, only because of my belief that the school will have little influence. Were I convinced the school would effectively use the full armamentarium of Skinner's techniques, the smile would fade. Even with satisfactory answers to all of my pointed questions I would be most reluctant to let the schools establish my children's value systems. But it is in just such social institutions that operant techniques are being applied.

Designed control of behavior as represented in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* may never encompass the entire culture as dreamed by Skinner. The possibility, though, is genuine. The first steps have already been made in schools, clinics, and factories. By whom? and to what ends?

— *Gordon Harrington*

FILM

Gerald Weales

Mailer's Maidstone

Norman Mailer's most recent movie, *Maidstone*, strikes me, as his books usually do, as intensely personal, highly ironic, wise, platitudinous, ponderous, witty, confused, clear, admirable and annoying. Although the pejorative adjectives probably weigh more heavily here than they would in the case of the books, I do not want my doubts to get in the way of what is genuinely fascinating about the film.

Maidstone, which was two years a-cutting, was filmed in five days during the summer of 1968, the summer of the plastic Republican convention and the bloody Democratic one which became the occasion for Mailer's *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*. Although the film was shot before Mailer slipped into his disguise as "the reporter" and set off for the conventions, both it and the "informal history" grew out of the same atmosphere and reflect similar political and personal concerns. One might almost say that both works are attempts by Mailer to understand and to use his responses to the killing of Robert Kennedy and to the forces which that assassination, and the murder of Martin Luther King, set loose in the country.

There is a plot of sorts in *Maidstone*, although, in both senses of the word, it is kept purposely obscure. The narrative line is broken so that the story cannot be told in what was once the conventional fashion and, as a result, the details of the conspiracy are never very clear. Set in the near future in an America even more chaotic than that of 1968, the film is about a movie director, WASPishly named Norman T. Kingsley (played by Norman Mailer), at once popular and artistic, and the plot to murder him or elect him president. The first extended scene involves a gathering of power figures. They appear to be discussing Kingsley's credentials as a potential candidate until, teeter-totter, the whole scene turns awry with the words of one of them—a serious, almost solemn man weighed down by affairs of state or a hangover, convincingly played by an academic colleague of mine, Robert Lucid, the Mailer scholar. (I suspect that it is some measure of one's in-ness to pick out the performers, most of them amateurs, as they appear on screen; comfortably outside, I recognized practically no one but Mailer and Rip Torn.) "The thing that we have to decide is whether or not we will let this man live." That, at least, was the gist of the character's statement and, since the dialogue was improvised, I do not mind filtering it through my own words. The point of the scene, I assume, is that the meeting is in fact a double one, that—in the climate in which the film was shot—to choose a candidate is to mark him for destruction. This is confirmed by the presence of one of Kingsley's close associates among the conspirators and the recruiting of his demonic half-brother (Rip Torn) into the plot. There is at least a suggestion that this character, the leader of a gang of hangers-on called the Cashbox, is another self of Kingsley's. Also in the conspiracy is the television commentator who opens the film and returns from time to time to plug the audience back into the fragmented story; at first impersonal, despite (or because of) her gushily fake warmth, she reveals herself as openly involved in a not very effective macabre hate scene in which she bathes a naked doll in

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what looks like catsup. After all, as Chicago showed, the presumably objective media are part of the action, a circumstance that is further confirmed —Mailer would say—by the behavior of the New York newspapers during his mayoralty campaign in 1969. Given this political-spiritual milieu, it is hardly surprising that the film builds, however indirectly, toward a *Walpurgisnacht* celebration, as Assassination (read Inaugural) Ball.

Kingsley is finally introduced and for the next hour the film deals with two simultaenous actions: his filming of what appears to be soft-core porno, a program picture about a male whorehouse with female customers, and his attempt to further his presidential candidacy. The film cuts back and forth between interviews with girls who want to appear in the film and with representatives of potentially difficult political blocs—a McCarthy liberal, some black power advocates, some young people. Politics may be property in "The Siege of Chicago," but for Mailer sexuality has always been one form of property, as he uses the word, and these scenes are presumably to suggest both decadence and power, the unsteady blend that Mailer, the Puritan sybarite, invokes in the scene in "Siege" in which he half suspects that his afternoon's "dalliance" (only Mailer could use a word like that these days) is responsible for the attack on Kennedy. Although *Variety* (September 16, 1970), reviewing the first showing of *Maidstone* at the Venice Film Festival, calls what we see of Kingsley's movie "a gamy if never vulgar look at sex," it is, in fact, an exercise in tame, almost prudish pornography redeemed by a few witty lines and by the fact that the black stud never removes his sun glasses in his sex scene with the white customer.

Then the Assassination Ball with both Mailer and Torn decked out in full dress, strangely greenish in color, like Irish Mr. Interlocutors (Kennedys?) in search of end men. What happens is very confusing: a churn of faces and figures, Mailer posing, Torn sweating, a frightening face-to-face between the two of them. Finally, a black man begins to cry out hysterically and reaching, anxious hands hold him down while off-screen a voice (that of Beverly Bentley, then Mrs. Mailer) screams at the band to play, to exercise its freedom. I could have sworn that I saw a green-clad body fall just before the man's scream began and I assumed that the hysteric was the assassin, that the murder had been fully acted out. Since Mailer, in "A Course in Film-Making" (*New American Review*, Number 12), speaks of "the attempt of assassination" taking place at the ball, I am presumably wrong, but it really matters very little whether the killing took place or not. An earlier dream scene in which the director is stretched out on the floor, the name given to the ball sequence (the numbered fragments in the film are given titles), the pervasiveness of the conspiracy plot, all these make assassination the necessary end of the Kingsley story. So, too, does the political-social undertone.

After the ball is over, there is a two-character scene in which, at first, Kingsley appears to be talking to one of the actresses. It quickly becomes clear, however, that this is Norman Mailer talking to his wife, that we have moved out of the Kingsley film and will not return. Cut to the cast sitting at ease on the ground while Mailer, standing in front of them, the old professor, leads a discussion of the film, nails down the aesthetics of the experiment, the need to get at truth by showing that any event exists always and simultaneously at a variety of levels, wearing a multiplicity of faces. Lecture over, everyone heads for the beach, a pattern of strangely calm strollers, and the movie appears to be reaching an unlikely peaceful conclusion. At this point, Rip Torn, an odd smile on his face, approaches Mailer, declares that the film is unfinished and attacks him with a hammer. At Venice, Jean Rouch (whose *cinema vérité* has never seemed true to me) denounced the end of the film as a fake, and even a man who has read the accounts of the Mailer-Torn fight that ended the five-days shooting—Mailer's battered head, Torn's bitten ear—might stop to wonder why it was that Torn had a hammer in his knapsack, like the hero of an animated cartoon who always has the right weapon at hand. Whether the fight was Mailer's invention, an improvisation gone mad, or Torn's demented insight, it was real enough—ugly, ungainly, clumsy with not a touch of John Wayne style to it. After the first moment of violence, the first flow of blood, the opponents were parted and the fight turned verbal—whining accusations, recriminations, each man aiming to diminish the other's body and mind.

Torn was right, of course, and, whether or not the fight was part of the original conception, Mailer indicated in his cutting of the film that he agreed. The film could not end without an attack on Mailer. The aesthetics—that slipping concept of truth—demands it. Kingsley and Mailer are one. The novelist, like his fictional self, is a movie director and a perennial fantasy candidate for president. Kingsley's ideas are Mailer's and so is their delivery. Kingsley courts violence as Mailer did in Chicago when, toward the end of the convention, putting his reporter's pose aside, he made a vain attempt to be a participant and, finally, settled for a bit of games-playing with the police. Since the final cut of the film came after the conventions, after the writing of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, after Mailer's campaign for mayor, I cannot escape the feeling that in *Maidstone* Mailer is, once again, doing his Thomas à Kempis impression, turning out a *De Imitatione Kennedi.* Being Mailer, however, he not only plays with the possibility of himself as a Kennedy martyr, but he has the irony to cut himself down to size. "There seemed no rank in any Army suitable for him below the level of General," he says of himself in "Siege" in a moment of bourbon-inspired grandiloquence, but the troops march without him and he leaves Chicago remembering, placating the "proud disapproval" in the eyes of Senator McCarthy's daughter. And *Maidstone* ends with Rip Torn's derisive finger pointing at the camera, at Mailer, and Torn's last incoherent "you-you-you" which says what we all know—that if there is one voice that will keep going as long as the tape is on it is that of Norman Mailer.

But what of *Maidstone* as a movie? It has some virtues, the most obvious of which is the presence of Mailer; his self-irony becomes almost mischievousness as in every scene he undercuts his

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own tendency toward pomposity. There are a few good images, some funny lines, a fascinating performance by Rip Torn, an occasionally effective dramatic bit (Mailer's cheerfully lunatic wordless song in the scene between Kingsley and his former mistress), but the film never really comes alive until Torn pulls out his hammer. Until that final break-out of reality, *Maidstone* comes across as an unhappy marriage of *cinema vérité* and the art film at its most self-conscious and derivative. No one, after *Last Year at Marienbad*, would dare turn his camera along a garden path lined with statuary, but that empty shot turns up, again and again, and without even a hint that it is a joke. Fellini hovers over the Assassination Ball and the dream sequence whispers Bergman, Buñuel (the last name keeps turning up in the dialogue). Figures are constantly caught in otherwise uninhabited landscapes, as though Antonioni were back in town, and there are even traces of Andy Warhol. There is no hint of wit in all these echoes, as there is in Truffaut's quotation from Vigo or even in John Boorman's affectionate parodies in *Having a Wild Weekend*. Lacking both humor and purpose, these references serve only to remind us that we have been here before and with more pleasure, more excitement.

This feeling is intensified by the pace at which Mailer lets his film move. Most of the scenes are too extended, go on long after both idea and image have been planted in the watcher's mind. The verbal exchanges are full of pregnant pauses which finally give birth to nothing but audience irritation, and the camera lingers over uncommunicative faces as though, if it stayed there long enough, they might bloom into significance. An obvious risk of amateur improvisation, one might assume, but since Mailer had fifty-odd hours of film to play with he must have chosen all those silences, all that repetition because he assumed that it was necessary to the "indescribable psychic structure" he mentioned when he defended his work after the showing at the Cinema City festival in London. (Reported in *The New York Times*, October 17, 1970).

"I am now more interested in form than in content," he explained to a young man who was worried about the substance of the film. For me, as the bulk of this review indicates, the content of *Maidstone* almost saves it from its fashionably eclectic form. □

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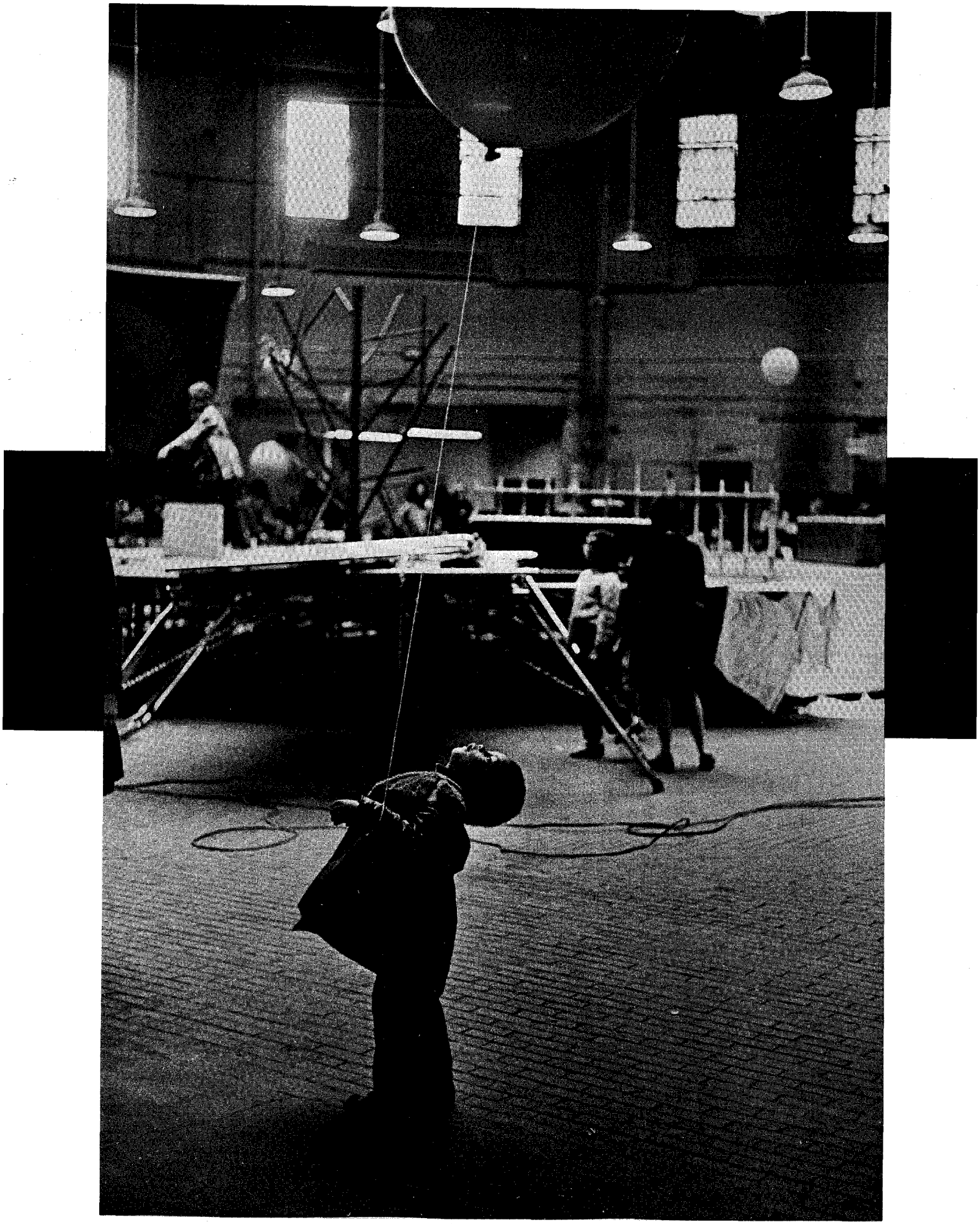

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